

CARNIVALISATION OF CATASTROPHE: A STUDY OF COMEDY IN HOWARD
BARKER'S THEATRE OF CATASTROPHE

by

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Abstract

This research explores the humour and laughter in Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe in the light of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque against the backdrop of the post-Second-World-War British (post-WWII) society and cultural tendencies and problems thereof. In this research, which explores the different stages of Barker's work – namely plays written in the seventies, the eighties and early nineties – I argue that comedy and laughter are pivotal to Howard Barker's theory for theatre which ultimately shaped his Theatre of Catastrophe as a tragic theatre.

Howard Barker forged the appearance of a unique theatrical practice, the Theatre of Catastrophe, not only through the revival of pain, death and tragedy but also through the juxtaposition of the carnivalesque and death/tragedy. This research therefore, studies transformation in Barker's art of theatre in a period of twenty years and demonstrates how the playwright deviates from tenets he set for his tragic theatre without necessarily betraying its tragic spirit. It is worth highlighting the observation that, the marriage of catastrophe and the carnivalesque remains the most significant achievement of Barker's art of theatre.

Chapter Two of the research explores Bakhtin's theory of the carnival through the elaboration of crucial concepts such as the grotesque imagery, laughter and the marketplace. Bakhtin's thoughts on laughter root in Henri Bergson's theory of laughter. Definitely the realm of laughter somewhere in between art and life, both Bergson and Bakhtin also emphasise on the negative aspect of laughter. The engagement of individuals in the marketplace creates the concrete presence which is crucial to the carnivalesque. Taking into account the tenets of the

Bakhtinian carnivalesque, this second chapter also concisely studies the challenges posed to the carnival theory by philosophers such as Umberto Eco and Terry Eagleton. The chapter finally investigates the revival of the concept of the carnival in the post-war British drama by studying David Edgar's advocacy of Augusto Boal's thoughts on the theatre and the necessity of the carnival.

Chapters Three and Four offer close analyses of the plays written by Barker in the seventies, eighties and early nineties with the primary aim to show the turns and shifts that he takes in the development of his career as an oppositional playwright in search of a remedy to the cultural malaise of his day. The plays selected for these chapters are the ones which the playwright has categorised as his best plays, namely, *Claw* (1975), *Stripwell* (1975), *The Love of a Good Man* (1978), *The Power of the Dog* (1984), *The Castle* (1985), *The Europeans* (1987), *(Uncle) Vanya* (1992).

Chapter Five sums up the findings on the research and concludes that Barker's comic sense goes beyond the comic sense ascribed to many tragic playwrights. The comedy which permeates his theatre of catastrophe shares affinities with the carnival leading to a carnivalisation of catastrophe in Barker's tragic theatre despite the claims by the Barker and his downplaying of the comedy which exists in his oeuvre.

Declaration

I, Mahboube Khalvati, hereby declare that this thesis for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree submitted to the Department of English has not been submitted previously for any degree at this or any other university. It is original in design and in execution, and all reference material contained herein has been duly acknowledged.

Candidate's Signature: **Ms Mahboube Khalvati:**



Date: **02 May 2019**

Supervisor's Signature: **Prof ZT Motsa:**



Date: **07 May 2019.**

Dedication

This thesis is humbly dedicated to my parents, Mahin Razmkhah and Naser Khalvati.

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CHAPTER ONE

1 Introduction and Research Overview

1.1. Aims and Motivation

The socio-political consciousness that was shaped after the Second World War in the British society provided the young generation of playwrights with the impetus to work harder on the formation of a theatre for the opposition. For this young generation who, in the main shared Marxist-Leninist viewpoints, the election of Margaret Thatcher as the British Prime Minister of the Conservative government in 1979 meant a drawback in not only socio-political arenas but also in the cultural sphere of life. Howard Barker mentioned in his *Arguments for A Theatre* that when opposition loses power it should then root in arts (1997, p.17). Consequently, he seeks to create a new form of theatre for the opposition.

It has been common practice, in the literary arts, to see writers create their works by using both the original and the borrowed art from predecessors as well as contemporaries. The reason is that they all comment on and shape the direction of the society that we live in. This age-old practice of grafted art is similarly observed between Russia's Anton Chekhov (1860 – 1904) and England's Howard Barker (b.1946). Barker's re-writing of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (written 1897) raised questions about the under-acknowledged aspects of Howard Barker's theatre which formed the initial idea underlying the current research. Therefore, Barker's conversation with the dead playwright served as the point of departure for the quest

through which Barker's early plays as well as plays which he categorises under the Theatre of Catastrophe will be studied in a new light.

It is important to first provide a quick background on Anton Chekhov for purposes of contextualising the “borrowing and adaptation” done by the younger dramatist, Howard Barker. Approximately a century after the publication of Anton Chekhov's play in 1897 and its subsequent production in 1899, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, still featured in the British theatre stages throughout the 20th century. Many critics hold the view that Chekhov remains the most staged playwright next to William Shakespeare in Britain (Bykov, 2010; Smith, 2006; Rabey, 2003). The plenitude of English productions of Chekhov in the 1980s and 1990s would convince one that Chekhov has taken over in the capacity of an English playwright (Rabey, 2003, p.201). It was not, therefore, uncommon for a prolific playwright such as Howard Barker to consider re-writing the play in the manner which would fit into his own manifesto for theatre as articulated in his *Arguments for a Theatre* (1997) in a time of "literary necrophilia" (p.153).

In the four-act *Uncle Vanya*, Chekhov depicts the country life of the people who, despite their awareness of the boringness and futility of their lives, fail to overthrow the routineness of their situation. They make an abortive attempt to achieve their desires, but it only leads to the suppressing of their energies through succumbing to an ill self-denial and "the power of pity" (Barker, 2004, p.292). The play is better described as a play of emotions rather than actions. It majorly features emotional confessions by the characters rather than the actions they desire they could take to have materialised their dreams. Nonetheless, the determinism and naturalism, which Chekhov has cast on the play, leave no room for the characters to escape from the stranglehold but to resume their same mundane lifestyles.

Chekhov's ironic tragedies were considered as the post-war form of 'modern classic drama' and dominated theatres "sympathetically observe lost chance, missed opportunity, the sterility of self-defeating self-preoccupation and entropy" (Rabey, 2003, pp.1-2). It is important to note that while Chekhov's drama reacts to the Russian society and mood at Chekhov's time, "British and Irish neo-Chekhovian drama claims for itself an authoritative timeless wisdom (or even absolution) in renunciation of resistance to 'inevitabilities'" (*Ibid.*). In an interview with David Ian Rabey at City University in New York, Barker explains that:

[...] I had an attitude to Chekhov, which was not what the London critics thought, when they were enraged by and despised my (*Uncle*) *Vanya*. They thought I was attacking Chekhov, when I was attacking the use to which Chekhov is put, at least in England, where the Chekhovian text is more celebrated than Shakespeare's, and Chekhov is in effect the national dramatist. The inertia – and what is worse, the charm which is attached to inertia, making impotence charming – was I thought a sign of national decay. I could not resist taking that moment [...]: where, in Chekhov, Vanya proves incapable even of shooting his worst enemy, and instead have the bullet strike home, so that from that moment Vanya is driven from one decision to another. That is what that moment is about, and yes it was a crucial moment in my exile from the theatre of my own country (Barker, 2010, p.215).

Consequently, Howard Barker, as a playwright with a vision and a philosophy of his own, deems it necessary to write tragedies as the art form for a society which faces many challenges in the political and social arena costing arts dearly in many respects. Therefore, to form his opposition theatre, The Theatre of Catastrophe, Howard Barker embarks on a journey of playwriting which hugely relies on humour and laughter. In order to investigate the comic aspect of Barker's tragedies which constitutes the hypothesis of this research, Barker's plays written in the 70s and 80s are studied.

In view of the above, Barker's re-working of a Chekhovian play, acts as the motivation for this research to propose and investigate the hypothesis that **by re-working Chekhov's comedy *Uncle Vanya*, Howard Barker's tragic theatre, which highlights the otherwise ignored aspects of his Theatre of Catastrophe.** The primary hypothesis of this research therefore, is that Howard Barker has created his own dramaturgy to give birth to the “catastrophic laughter”.

Why not Tragedy?

The point may be postulated that Howard Barker's work should be appreciated only from the traditional tragedy lens and scholars need not strive to see anything beyond that standard approach. It is my contention that the younger playwright, Barker is presenting more than standard tragedy or comedy in his reworking of the older playwright, Chekhov. First, one needs to explain that Howard Barker is one of England's prominent playwrights. In addition to more than 100 plays (Rabey, 2013, p.1), he has written since 1970, Barker is also a poet, essayist and opera writer. Furthermore, Howard Barker is the proponent of the return of the theatre of the tragic. The said campaign notwithstanding, he has at times immersed his art in the comic despite a latter day strong advocacy for tragedy. This thus reveals that the relationship Barker has with specific dramatic genres of choice is complex, as he seems to embrace both the tragedy and comedy in varying degrees as reflected in this statement:

Howard Barker's plays are known for their fearless exploration of power, sexuality and human motivation. His texts overflow with rich language, challenging ideas, history beauty, violence and *imaginative comedy*, all brought together within the extremes of human experience ... [emphasis added] (The Wrestling School, 2010).

Seemingly explaining the dilemma of confining art into one specific strand or type, in his *Arguments for A Theatre*, Barker himself contends that, "[a]rt is not digestible" (1997, p.138) and the, "comedy that exists in my work is a cruel one, and the laughter that emerges uneasily from it is laughter of disbelief and not a laugh of public unity" (1997, pp.33-34). It is therefore my supposition that Howard Barker's support for tragedy does not call to the total exclusion of the other genre, comedy. It would seem that even through humour and laughter, he still finds enough room to explore the intensity of emotion and incite hard and cruel comic laughter from the audience. The comic aspect of Barker's theatre and its humour inflict an unfamiliar sense of discomfiture in the audience just as does his tragedy. Both genres seem to challenge the comfort zone of the audience.

Hence, this research's move to tackle the comic aspect of Howard Barker's theatre neither should mislead us nor presuppose our muted ignorance to the opposite side of the generic binary in this dramatist's preoccupations. This leads us to believe that Barker's theatre would be a theatre of "dislocation and not unification" (Barker, 1997, p.34). Therefore, the hypothesis is that in his comedy Barker seeks catastrophe, just as he does in his tragedy. Consequently, we presume that his theatre of catastrophe is not only confined to the one tragic aspect. It incorporates a comic aspect as well. The playwright himself admits, "I attempted and abandoned naturalist play by a number of means. Firstly, satire, secondly, in my case, by the effective banning of the room [*sic*]" (Barker, 1997, p.33). The on-going dabbling in and blending various genres is an old game to many writers. That is why I find it a worthy challenge to explore the not-so-common "Barkerian" humourous genus. Hence, the study of carnivalesque aspects of Barker's tragedies, which forms part of his complex Theatre of Catastrophe, is an all-essential cause through which this research hopes to add to the body of knowledge in the oeuvre of Barker's theatre.

The significance of the present research is that it poses questions regarding Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe which were not raised before because the tragedy of his Theatre was taken for granted. This research, nevertheless, delves into the depth of the Theatre of Catastrophe to examine the hypotheses, which will be discussed below.

1.2. Hypotheses and Theory

Contradiction is the essence of Howard Barker's dramaturgy. In support of this view, Houth argues that, "his whole sense of life – which was redeemed by passion rather than love – repudiated the reduction to single meanings that culture demands as due payment for its tolerance ..." (Barker/Houth, 2012, p.12).

Because of these shades of blended and contradictory characteristics of self-expression in Barker's theatre, the study of Barker's best plays in the seventies, eighties and early nineties offers interesting insights into the depth of Barker's theatre. This research will finally offer a comparative study of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* and Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* to further take on its significant hypothesis that despite the common belief, Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe is not solely characterised by tragedy.

As mentioned earlier, Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* had gained an undeniable place on the British stage despite its being "tempered for time" (Barker, 1997, p.169). Howard Barker argues that:

If *Uncle Vanya* and the Chekhovian cannon [*sic*] as a whole makes repudiation its ethical character, the best that can be achieved from the performance of the existing text, if it is not to be rendered into a bloodless idyll spun between an unsexed man and a never-to-be-sexual woman – a perverse beauty shared by

Sonya and Vanya – is to indict the audience with precisely the same lack of heroism as characters – 'Are you not all Sonyas? Are you not all Vanyas?' (*Ibid.*, p.170).

Howard Barker contends that the underlying energies of Chekhov's plays do not contribute to the provocation of the audience's thought and will not consequently lead to any motivation in them for change. After watching the play, the audience even sink deeper into their comfort zones.

Howard Barker is renowned for his Theatre of Catastrophe and revival of tragedy in the post-war British drama. This dissertation, however, seeks to prove that contrary to the tragic realm in which Barker has firmly established himself, the comic is indispensable from the Theatre of Catastrophe in his works.

One of the prevalent themes in Barker's theories of theatre is his contempt for laughter, which officially dominated theatres in the seventies and after, and was the state's favourite theme. Consequently, one would expect that Barker's works be devoid of laughter. He, nonetheless, opts for a cruel version of laughter. Thus, I would like to argue that the underlying principles of the Theatre of Catastrophe are humour and carnival depicted through grotesque images. Secondly, my supposition is that humour and comedy for Barker serve as tools to create an expressive space, which was not so easy to find in the socio-political climate of the day. The fall of Stalinism and the establishment of conservative governments in Europe led to a state-sponsored populism in the decades after the Second World War. Keeping to the style of twentieth century's committed theatre of staging the state and its systems, Howard Barker's plays similarly mirrored the life of the times through theme and character that largely depicted the "catastrophes" of life, which inform the bulk of his drama's concerns. It is not

merely concomitant that Howard Barker's Vanya should say that the gun, which Chekhov gave him despite his hatred for it, "is the lever of [his] life" (Barker, 2004, p.301).

In order to examine the above-mentioned hypotheses, I employ Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnival to the most prominent plays of Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. The use of humour for Barker is not teleological. The world Barker creates features a rather dystopian carnivalesque filled with cruel laughter. Consequently, what makes Bakhtin's carnival theory a proper theoretical basis for the study of the explained hypotheses is the fact that difference and alteration are two major elements of Bakhtinian categories. They offer an original "affinity for the oppressed and marginal", which makes them appropriate for the analysis of Barker's polemics and marginal characters (Stam, 1989, p.21). Moreover, as propounded by Terry Eagleton (1989), Bakhtin's notion of the carnival is one of the few modern critical concepts which have been shown to be fertile, suggestive and productively polymorphous (*Ibid.*, p.178).

It is important to note that Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe as well as his characters are either marginalised or depict marginal people striving to make their way into the mainstream trends of arts, politics and society. Instead of the temporal utopianism of Bakhtin's carnival, Barker pursues a permanent dystopianism, which is eventually more accommodating. In order to create such a world, Barker, like Bakhtin, uses obscenities, extremism and corporeality.

Bakhtin's definition of carnival in *Rabelais and His World* (1984) could be also employed to describe the Theatre of Catastrophe in following terms: "to consecrate inventive freedom, [...], to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (p.34).

The significance of Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque for this research is that it introduces the prospects for a very different world with a new order. The new world is capable of

demonstrating to humanity the way "out of confines of the apparent (false) unity, of the indisputable and stable". It leads man to "return unto himself" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.48).

The grotesque, which is based on the principles of laughter and the carnival spirit, is mandated with emancipating human beings from all manifestations of "inhuman necessity" that permeate the world. Laughter and carnival spirit liberates "human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.49). The application of Bakhtin's carnival theory to Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe offers a novel and seminal vantage point on his aesthetics.

The discussed theories will be then applied to analyse the literary corpus of the research which includes several of the best plays of the Theatre of Catastrophe as selected by Howard Barker himself in his *Arguments for a Theatre: The Castle* (1985), *The Power of the Dog* (1984), *The Love of a Good Man* (1978), *Claw* (1975) and *The Europeans* (written 1987) (1997, p.34). In Chapter Three, I will offer a thorough study of Barker's significant plays of the 1970s, namely, *Claw*, *Stripwell* (1975), and *The Love of a Good Man* (1978).

Before proceeding with any in-depth discussion of the plays, it is helpful to have a plot summary on each play so as to avail common understanding of the storyline.

Claw (1975) is a satirical play evolving around the life of Noel Bildew, a short-sighted boy, who survives his childhood against all the ridicule directed at him. Noel is born to munitions worker while his (step-)father has been away for five years as a prisoner of war. The communist Mr. Biledew does not show any compassion for Noel but advises him, after his expulsion from school, to harness his anger. Noel proudly chases his carrier as a pimp and does not miss any opportunities to recruit girls who have the potential to boost his business. As Noel succeeds in his business, he finds high-ranking clients including a Tory Minister. Overestimating his position, Noel engages in a relationship with Minister's wife leading to a

roadside affairs and a confrontation with a policeman. Claw seeks political assistance from the Minister to escape imprisonment. However, he only finds himself in an asylum betrayed by his powerful client.

Stripwell (1975) is another satirical play by Barker. Here the playwright mingles aspects of comedy and humour and is characterised more as a commercial play by the playwright himself. Graham Stripwell, a judge, sentences Cargill, a criminal, to imprisonment for which the latter swears to take revenge. Stripwell is in a relationship with a go-go dancer, Babs, and has suggested her to run off together. Babs, however, meets Stripwell's son, Tim, and falls in love with him and walks out on the Judge. Tim shares his plans to earn money by drug trafficking with Babs who agrees to join him. Feeling abandoned by his girlfriend, Stripwell ignores his son and reports their intended crime to the police. Learning about it, his wife also walks out leaving Stripwell on his own when the released Cargill appears and murders Stripwell.

The Love of a Good Man (1978) is set in Passchendaele, a part of a First World War battlefield, in 1920. The area is intended to be transformed to a military cemetery and to be visited by Edward, the Prince of Wales. He is scheduled to randomly pick a body of a soldier out of a million for whom a national memorial will be held in Westminster Abbey. Amidst the hard work to finish the graveyard project and prepare it for an upcoming visit by the Prince of Wales, an aristocratic woman, Mrs. Toynbee along with her daughter, Lalage, arrive in quest of her son's corpse to be illegally retrieved to England and be buried under a family tree. As the request Mrs. Toynbee puts forward to Mr. Hacker, the contractor for the project, is illegal, she decides to offer her body to Mr. Hacker to retrieve his son's body.

In order to reach the reward Mrs. Toynbee has promised Mr. Hacker makes an arrangement so that the number of an exhumed body which they falsely pretend to be Mrs. Toynbee's son

be written all over the book out of which the visiting Prince Edward is to choose one blindfolded. Mrs. Toynbee does not succumb to Mr. Hacker's desire and does not keep her promise which leads to Mr. Hacker's revelation of the truth about the undiscovered corpse of his son Mrs. Toynbee keeps denying the fact though.

It is important to note that in Chapter Four, the role of humour as social leveller will be discussed in the following of Barker's plays: *The Power of the Dog* (1984), *The Castle* (1985), *The Europeans* (1987) and *(Uncle) Vanya* (written 1992, staged 1995).

The Power of the Dog (1984) is an (anti-)history play by Howard Barker engaging with the creation of a new map for Europe in a meeting between Stalin and Churchill. The play further depicts battlefields in Poland where a former fashion model and current war photographer seeks to depict war atrocities. While doing her photography project, she comes across the corpse of her sister and embarks on a quest to find the murderer.

Matrimova, an arts student, is making a film entitled "War" hoping to offer images of the realities of the battlefield which are unprecedented in the cinema. Ilona discovers that Sorge, a Russian officer, has led her sister to commit suicide finding herself in a situation where he seeks to start a relationship with her. Sorge kills the other photographer, Victor, to pave the way for Ilona to photograph Stalin. He is, however, arrested for Ilona's sister's death. When meeting Stalin, Ilona's emotions succumb to Stalin's power and intimidated by him, she falls into his arms and pleads him to spare the lives of Sorge and her which Stalin accepts.

The Europeans (1987) which is based on theatricalised facts about the siege of Vienna by Turkish soldiers in the 17th century, depicts the pain and the catastrophe of the protagonist. Starhemberg, a military comrade, and Katrin who is amputated and raped by Turkish soldiers and is pregnant. Starhemberg refuses the honours which the Emperor seeks to grant him while Katrin insists that her child delivery must be organised as a ceremony in which the

public can participate and observe the cruelty she went through. Starhemberg falls in love with Katrin and requests her to father his child. Katrin, however, tells Starhemberg that she cannot feed the child as her breasts had been amputated; therefore, the child cannot survive. With the approach of Jemal Pasha, Leopold the Emperor, orders that they bring the child whom he names "Concilia" and gives the child to the Turks.

The next is *The Castle* (1985), one of Barker's plays which studies issues on women and power relations. Stucley, a knight, returns to his village after fighting in the Crusades for seven years. In the absence of their men, women villagers neglected the village and started practicing same sex relations. They only relied on men who remained at the village for procreation. In other words, women broke away from every sort of masculine authority including that of God.

Upon his return, Stucley begins restoring the lost order by mandating the priest to restore the church which was home to cows and bird dung into its respectable status. While busy with his mission, Stucley receives a proposal from the captive Arab architect whom he had brought with to construct a castle. The Arab architect sells his idea to the knight emphasising the defence aspect of the castle while he intends to take revenge.

Stucley's wife who was in a romantic relationship with Skinner, the witch, becomes more interested in the castle than her leading Skinner to murder the builder to regain Ann's attention. Stucley sentences Skinner to imprisonment and then releases her while the body of the dead builder is tied to her. His wife, Ann, falls in love with the Arab engineer is impregnated with his baby. She suggests the architect to elope together only to find that the castle is too fortified to be inescapable. Ann consequently stabs herself and the baby to death. Stucley fails at practicing his cult of Christianity, is murdered and finally the priest requests Skinner to become the village leader which she accepts.

(Uncle) Vanya (1992/1995) is peculiar in its forthright germination from Chekhov. It is a re-working of Chekhov's "Comedy in Four Acts" and a play which re-arranges and harnesses the energy of especially Vanya, bringing him empowerment. In Chekhov's play, Serebryakov and his young beautiful wife arrive at his deceased wife's property left for him (Serebryakov) and is managed by the professor's daughter, Sonya, and his brother-in-law, Uncle Vanya. The professor whose dreams of thriving in arts is abandoned and is ill has decided to sell the estate without considering his mother-in-law, Uncle Vanya and Sonya who are living there.

Once Serebryakov announces his decision, Vanya who is both disappointed at Serebryakov career failures and is outraged at his winning the heart of such a beautiful young woman, loses control and brings his gun to shoot him, only to miss. Chekhov's Uncle Vanya is impotent. He loves Yelena who is married to Serebryakov and yet in love with Dr. Astrov. He has wasted his life serving the interests of Serebryakov having no vision for his future. After the encounter between Uncle Vanya and Serebryakov, the professor cancels his decision to sell the property and leaves for the town. His departure restores peace to Uncle Vanya and Sonya whose love for Dr. Astrov fails to bear fruit.

In Barker's *(Uncle) Vanya*, Vanya successfully shoots Serebryakov and kills him. Serebryakov's ghost appears on the stage and participates in conversations voicing Chekhov's views. Sonya asphyxiates Astrov who acts as another ghost. Then a sea appears with a man drowning in it; it turns out to be Chekhov who is ill and has come to join them and die there. He passes on while Vanya holds his hands upon his request. Upon Chekhov's death, characters feel awkward vis-à-vis their freedom. Helena who has Vanya as her lover proposes that they sign a suicide pact and Vanya implements it. He confirms his ability to do so but leaves and does not return.

Chapter Three is significant as it establishes the mechanism which operates comedy in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. Chapter Five will sum up the findings and implications of the research as well as suggestions for further research.

1.3. Review of Literature

The approach to this review of related literature is framed on these key points: the historical background of Chekhov and his reception among the British theatregoers and critics, the works of Howard Barker in the same British society, after the Second World War. The review looks at Barker's thoughts and theories for theatre stipulated in *Arguments for A Theatre* and *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre*. Principal work on theatre and playwrights on both Chekhov and Barker comes from David Ian Rabey (1989, 2003, and 2009), Patrick Miles (1993), Michael Patterson (2003), Charles Lamb, (2005), inter alia.

1.3.1. Chekhov in the Context of the Post- World War II British Society

Drawing on the existing literature on the reception of Chekhov in the British society after the Second World War, this section of the literature review offers both a review of the said literature and an analysis of how the assimilation of Chekhov on the British stages urged

Howard Barker to commence negotiations with the dead author. The section, therefore, relies majorly on the scholarship on Chekhov during the said period.

Anton Chekhov, who lived and wrote in the height of the late 19th century realist era in Europe, was a writer and a physician; hence his scientific ideal of truth which prevailed his art. For Chekhov, the writer was required to remain as "impersonal as a doctor examining a patient" (Styan, 2006, p.83). Highly influenced by Russian realism, Chekhov possessed an exceptionally precise eye for finding "incongruities in human behaviour; ... [and it is his acute] observation and the study of actual life" that accounted for well-made plays, according to Chekhov (*Ibid.*). The realism ethos encouraged writers like Chekhov to lay bare the decay, vulnerabilities and similar weaknesses of society and human nature. Keeping this background in mind accords us a clearer understanding of Chekhov's presence in the post-World War II era, which can be better achieved by looking briefly at the process of the playwright's assimilation into the British Theatre, as revealed in the body of work done by several scholars.

War is one of the multifaceted social phenomena that bear ironical consequences on human life. What one war can afflict, another can heal. This is the case with Chekhov and his reception during the First and Second World Wars in Britain, as reflected in the body of research on his theatre and dramaturgy. The findings made by Miles, show that during the First World War, Chekhov was rejected by British theatre (1993, p.118). Interestingly, it is the Second World War which did justice to the reception of Chekhov's plays in Britain that was denied during the First World War. The role of the sporadic criticism, which was written on Chekhov's works in between the two wars, cannot be underestimated though (Meister, 1953, pp.118-119). It is such kind of work that affirms the central argument in our research that the popularity of Chekhov in the post war British society led to a vulgarisation of his

works and the high number of the performances of his play concentrated on limited aspects of his works, namely lack of potency, subordination to the existing situation and banality of life.

In British theatres, Chekhov's "sad humanist comedies of resignation to inevitabilities" (Rabey, 2003, p.68) were staged as the second performance choices after Shakespeare's plays when it came to the revival of classical pieces (*Ibid.*). However, with the passage of time, the popularity of Chekhov in Britain in the early and mid-twentieth century solicited not only frequent stage productions but also adoptions as well as re-writings of his plays. The integration of Chekhov and his works in the British society entails a rather complicated process to the extent that the enlightenment of the English public in the twentieth century "is epitomized [*sic*] in their response to Chekhov" (Miles, 1993, p.54). Responses to Chekhov's stories and plays went through an evolution of "reviewing to criticism" (*Ibid.*).

Many critics and scholars associated Chekhov's popularity in England with "the Edwardian nostalgia", which was discernible in the mid-twentieth century England when the public was "recovering to normal life amid post-World War II reality, the English found themselves looking **up**, and even, as it were, **forward**, to their pre World-War-I memories" (Klimenko, 2001, p.123).

A production of Chekhov's *The Seagull* at the Glasgow Repertory Theatre in 1908 marks an early British production of Chekhov. The production was promising although the case was not repeated in London when George Bernard Shaw sponsored the production of *The Cherry Orchard* by the Stage Society in 1911, and still described it as very successful (McDonald, 1980, pp.25-36). As Senelick (1985) explains, the Stage Society was "primed for social messages and dramas of reform" (p.142). Therefore, its audience found the "characters' self-involvement" as perplexing and "assumed that the play was an emanation of some mythical Slavic soul" (*Ibid.*).

In *The Times*, an anonymous review of the production blames the play's failure on unbalanced translation and the unfamiliarity of the actors with types (Miles, 1993, p.55).

Miles' explanation provides the essential social context as well where he wryly exclaims:

The thank-goodness-we're-not-like-that syndrome slides uncomfortably close to jingoism in these pre-First World War comments on Chekhov's characters. The originality of Chekhov for an English audience lay at least partly in his demand that they recognize [*sic*] precisely that they were like that – an admission not easy for the builders of empire (Miles, 1993, p. 57).

The concerning points with regard to the reception of Chekhov's plays were expressed by *The Times Literary Supplement* review on George Calderon's translations of *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard* published in 1912 and cited in *Chekhov on the British Stage*. The review states that: "It is quite possible that impatience with the flabby people whom Tchekhof shows us yearning vaguely, talking glibly, suffering helplessly, may blind the public in general to the beauty of his work" (*Anon.*, 1993, p.57).

The mood and atmosphere, which was produced by the war, changed the public's mind-set that "the yearnings and fecklessness of Chekhov's people seem apposite"(Miles, 1993, p.57) simultaneously with avant-garde movements. Consequently, Chekhov's plays were considered as "contemporary dejection in Russian dress" (*Ibid.*). The legacy of the war primed the atmosphere for a better understanding of Chekhov and the challenges of his drama. Senelick explains that:

Chekhov's career as professional humourist made him alert to the grotesque detail, the absurd facet of any situation; but more important is his ingrained awareness that the current of life, awash with the banal flotsam of everyday, sweeps away heroic poses and epic aspirations. A comic is natural when

grandiose philosophical questions and emotional crises have to share space with the inexorable demands of the humdrum (1985, p.34).

The era of heroism and advocacy of the epic terminated and was replaced with a more absurd and existential view of life. The existential questions posed by Chekhov's characters did not sound sensible to the modern audience while they sounded as more acceptable to the war-stricken British society of the early and mid-twentieth century.

The successful production of *The Cherry Orchard* by J.B. Fagan in May 1921 provoked positive reviews and led to the comprehensibility of Chekhov for the English. The acceptability of Chekhov by the English entailed the familiarity with his settings as well (Miles, 1993, p.60). After the above-mentioned production:

English reviewers and audiences had to recognize that Chekhov had been attempting something quite new in the theater. The review recorded the process of recognition step-by-step, building up awareness in the public at large of the criteria appropriate to Chekhov's drama, grouping for the outlines of individual performances, and providing some of the preliminaries for serious criticism which would establish Chekhov's place in world literature with authority [*sic*] (Miles, 1993, p.61).

With the production of Chekhov's plays, reviewers who were so far exposed to Ibsen and Shaw's plays, which addressed serious issues, were at first disillusioned. Indeed, reviewers who searched for "some holds on the amorphous enormity of Russian life" only discovered "a thoroughly English absence of drama" (Miles, 1993, p.63).

Rabey asserts that the post-war form of modern classic drama is frequently identified with Chekhov's ironic tragedies, which "sympathetically observe lost chance, missed opportunity, the sterility of self-defeating self-preoccupation and entropy" (2003, p.1). Terry Eagleton

explains that Chekhov lived in an era when "the more hopeful visions of modernity have declined into wistful, elegiac mood" (2003, p.236). Eagleton finds this situation ironic "since the wry bemusement of Chekhovian drama is among other things a reaction to the still-dawning modernization [*sic*] of Russia on the part of those whom this process is ousting" (*Ibid.*). However, unlike the Chekhovian drama which reacts to the Russian mood in a specific time span, the British and Irish neo-Chekhovian drama "claims for itself an authoritative timeless wisdom (or even absolution) in renunciation of resistance to inevitabilities" (Rabey, 2003, p.2).

There is no doubt that Chekhov's realist style and employment of mundane details which can lead to the creation of complexity has dominated the English dramatic realism since the 1930s (Rabey, 2003, p.48). Rabey elucidates that from the 1970s to the 1990s, the mainstream British comic drama "tended to centralise the besieged individual, who is aware of the breakdown of their systems of perception, in a form of Chekhovian ambivalent sympathy". The sympathy is believed to have "increasingly accorded with new terms of social and political retrenchment" (*Ibid.*, p.91). Barker loathed this sense of sympathy which also had its roots in the authoritarian policies dominating the culture and through his work sought to break away from such sentiments.

Rabey further observes that the admiration for Chekhov in the 1990s leads a playwright such as David Hare to "a correspondent deterministic fatalism, in which passionate emotion must always be disappointed or thwarted" (Rabey, 2003, p.114). Rabey argues that:

British theatre from the 1980s onwards venerated and reiterated a particularly deterministic reading of Chekhov's drama: this British neo-Chekhovian theatre sought reassurance through atonement, located maturity in self-restriction and was effectively complicit in reduction to order. Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* (written 1992) is an appropriately, thoroughly theatrical cultural and emotional riposte,

which, like Barker's other work, offers an expansion of the vocabulary, both theatrical and existential: an expansion of terms of language, experience and being, in defiance of the prevalent restrictions and diminutions of options presented (2009, p.21).

Chekhov is aware that "a better life necessitates newer forms"; however, he emphasises that shaping such new forms requires the outlines of the dominant patterns of the current life or the lived experience to be exported by "constantly keeping to the plain life". Consequently, in Chekhov's art "one get [*sic*] the impression that he deliberately keeps banging on the mundane life" to defamiliarise it. He further postpones life "until this recognition is fully internalized [*sic*]" (Ghaderi, 2006, p.92). Not only does Barker not relate to the mundane, he also goes to the other extreme by depicting catastrophic situations and putting his characters and audience through pain and anxiety.

Chekhov's lingering to the mundane to defamiliarise it has another side to it, which is counter-productiveness. On the one hand, his characters are held back by "the small trivialities of the existence" and, on the other hand, the audience seems unlikely to identify themselves with his pathetic characters. The implication of this reading of the Chekhovian pieces annuls the likelihood of catharsis (Coughlan, 2005, p.6). The contempt for catharsis, nevertheless, is one of the areas where the Chekhovian and the Barkerian theatres meet. Barker does not target catharsis; however, he seeks to present aspects of life to his audience in order to liberate them from the prescribed ways of thinking and acting.

Howard Barker believes that Chekhov is turned into an incandescent idol in the Western part of Europe than in his homeland due to his indisputable authority in the theatrical and cultural circles of Britain (1997, p.153). As discussed earlier, Barker believes that Chekhov's plays, especially *Uncle Vanya*, are "tempered for time" (1997, p.169). Contrary to Barker's belief, Bykov argues at one point that "Chekhov's humor is ontological. The humor is not in the

descriptions, not in the author's voice, not in traditional comedic techniques in general; it is in the gap between how people actually live and how they imagine themselves" [*sic*] (2010, pp.31-32). This is the same standpoint as taken in the research underway. It is my primary assertion that humour in Barker's theatre cannot be simply located in speeches, traditional comic techniques or even carnival theory per se. It is rather in relation to the socio-cultural context of his time that his comedy becomes meaningful.

Therefore, Chekhov's humour and comedy have remained niche areas of unsettled dispute among the literary scholars more than a century after the author's demise. Despite this, the research at hand takes Howard Barker's apprehension of Chekhov for granted. Smith explains that in his literary necrophilia, Barker chooses Chekhov to directly confront naturalist orthodoxy in English drama (2006, p.43). Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* was his first full-scale play, which did not feature the death of a character. However, Barker restores an abrupt death into the play thereby sabotaging the nostalgia of Chekhov's naturalism (*Ibid.*, p.45).

1.3.2. Barker's Emergence in the Post-World War II British Society

1.3.2.1. Books

This section of the literature review begins by briefly introducing Barker in the context of his time and the incidents/developments which led his theatre to be rejected from the mainstream British theatre. His theories for theatre as well as the philosophical and critical perspectives on his own work will be also explored before reviewing the research that has been conducted on his oeuvre.

Howard Barker initially emerged in the British theatrical milieu in the 1970s along with some other playwrights of his generation whose works featured political overtones. These political dramatists included Howard Brenton, David Hare and Caryl Churchill (Lamb, 2005, p.5).

This generation of left-wing playwrights vehemently believed in the perishability of capitalism. Much to their disappointment in three years' time, Margaret Thatcher won the British general election and initiated "widely acclaimed radically right-wing policies" (Patterson, 2003, p.65). Additionally, communism failed in Eastern Europe in approximately fifteen years -- all these developments *affected the society* and the playwrights who depicted it through the theatre. Mark Brown argues that "there is, among the leading theatre critics in London, a consensus on hostility where Barker's theatre is concerned; it is not a figment of Barker's imagination" (2013, p.100).

In an online article on *Telegraph*, Cavendish describes Barker as "The prophet without honour in his own land" and explains that Howard Barker considers being neglected in his own country as a common human phenomenon, instead of becoming upset or disturbed by it (Cavendish, 2002, p.N/A). Admitting the need for an examination of the reason behind his exclusion, Barker believes that he has the answer. In other words, he believed that his works transgress the time's cultural ideology which he terms as "liberal-humanist, left-leaning, socially progressive" (*Ibid.*). Barker's works which are amoral go against the grain of the English morality; a fact of which he is very well aware.

As a result, Barker felt that he is forced to defend his work on two aspects and stage it in his desired manner and without manipulation by directors. Hence, firstly, he wrote his 'Fortynine Asides for a Tragic Theatre' which was published in *The Guardian* in 1986 and which was later developed to *Arguments for a Theatre* in 1989 and, secondly, as mentioned earlier he founded his own theatre company The Wrestling School. Motsa argues that British theatre-

goers desired well-made plays that featured a solid statement at the end (2000, p.114). Therefore, the audience and theatre directors who expected plays of the social realist type were disappointed at Barker's plays. Hence, Barker felt the need to theorise his theatre.

Arguments for a Theatre serves as a vindication of Barker's theatrical style which is deeply rooted in the socio-political context of Britain in post-war years. Barker explains that the failure of politics led to a frustration which also paved the way for the promotion of philistinism under the guise of democratic art. Barker argues that under such circumstances theatre managers followed their opportunistic ambitions and the fringe deviated from its primary function by supporting the artists whose aesthetic was not oppositional at all (1997, p.20). The failure of socialism made Barker reconcile the meaning of socialism to him and the understanding that it had no meaning for him, Barker started to write plays without socialism; however, he admits that he found socialism in the plays.

Therefore, both Barker and his audience embarked on a journey of learning despite the audience's habit of being taught. This very experience, Barker believes, angered the audience who were used to certainties. Explaining this environment which was conducive to his formation of a new form, Barker mentions that he was compelled to abandon writing satires which had been one of his foundations because being a satirist required him to know while he realised that he knew less and less (Barker, 1989, p.21). The Barker admits that in a time of political collapse, the sole means, which made the change in form possible, was deterioration of habitual moral and political assumptions (*Ibid.*).

In shaping a new form for theatre which in turn obliges the shaping of a new audience, Barker does not trust comedy and believes "in a culture of diseased comedy it can't laugh" (1989, p.36). Laughter also indicates solidarity among the audience which Barker abhors and

tries to avoid at all costs; he mentions that his theatre never "aimed for solidarity, but to address the soul where it feels difference" (*Ibid.*, p.54).

Arguments for A Theatre indicates that Barker believes in the process of becoming, revisiting and renewing one's visions. Barker found the tension between the audience and the play aesthetic, "the nature of experience". This tension according to him encompasses "challenges to morality, common socialism, even [...] common humanity" (Barker, 1997, p.22). The collection of essays focuses on several issues with which Barker is unhappy in the contemporary British theatre and hence seeks to make his theatre be the change he wishes to see in the dramatic arts. Howard Barker manifestly announces that his theatre is all about tragedy and he has broken away from satirist and naturalistic plays of the early stage of his career. Throughout the essays, Barker does not fail to highlight the role of the audience as well as actors. His insistence on the employment of well-versed conversations has positioned him as a playwright with difficult and obscure plays. Barker, however, believes so strongly in his self-assigned mission of theatre of catastrophe as elaborated in his *Arguments for A Theatre* that he does not allow negative criticism to impede his artistic progress.

Theatre of Catastrophe is a term coined by Howard Barker. In his *Arguments for a Theatre* (1997), Barker outlines the characteristics of his Theatre of Catastrophe and elaborates on the issues, which necessitate this kind of theatre. Barker's foremost concern in styling the Theatre of Catastrophe has been furnishing the audience with "rights of interpretation" (Barker, 1997, p.51). Therefore, in his theatre, Barker's main concern is the audience's engagement with the stage rather the characters' "creative tension" with the stage. Howard Barker's braver theatre seeks not the life as it is but the life "as it might be lived" (*Ibid.*). Consequently, of the elements of the contemporary theatre, which Barker does not, favour is both realism and clarity.

Renouncing the orthodox morality and its promotion by the mainstream culture industry, Barker emphasises on the significance of staging the un-trodden paths for the audience in order to stimulate their imaginations. He admits that pain is indispensable from his theatre and anybody who wishes to watch his plays must be prepared for embracing pain otherwise they would opt for the entertainment theatre rather than his tragic theatre.

Consequently, to create the experience of pain, Barker relies on tragedy. He describes it as elitist and asserts that tragedy is the "art form for our time". Barker, however, is aware that elitism is a concept of obsessive contempt for both the left and right (1989, p.32). Despite this, Barker puts himself at the risk of being rejected by both sides as he admits that the liberalism of the majority of theatre managers, literary departments and directors allowed "class, gender, sexuality, violence, iconoclasm and blasphemy" (*Ibid.*) but not elitism. The reasons Barker gives for the above-mentioned assertion about tragedy is that, "It returns poetry to speech. Tragedy is not about reconciliation [...] Tragedy resists the trivialization [*sic*] of experience, which is the project of the authoritarian regime" (*Ibid.*, p.18).

Brown argues that if "the London critics' antipathy to Barker is rooted partly in the dramatist's eschewal of social realism, it is also largely an expression of a closely related concern, namely their frustration over the lack of easily identifiable *meanings*" (2013, p.95) in his theatre.

The ideas and concepts which Barker introduces and explains in *Arguments for A Theatre* regarding his theatre are comprehensive yet there are missing links in some of his theories which according to him are based on experience and practice. The contradictions which exist in his essays compared against what is practiced in his plays have provoked critiques on his works. For example, Richard Allen Clave argues that Barker's ideas as discussed in his essays are either under-developed or exist in vacuum. Clave believes that Barker repeats the

same thing over and over and fails to elaborate on his thoughts. Moreover, Clave complains that both Barker's plays and essays "are in imperatives" (1990, p.283).

Clave also discusses the issue of power relations in the theatre of catastrophe which is tasked with exposing its audience to catastrophic situations and giving them the opportunity to grow beyond disaster. Clave holds that encouraging the audience to take new stances to theatre is different from compelling them to develop such an approach. He argues that Barker's approach verges on forcing his audience to this new theatre; consequently, what Barker deems as liberating turns out to become "an exercise in psychological and emotional fascism" (*Ibid.*, p.283). Another weak point of Barker's *Arguments for A Theatre*, Clave explains, is that the examples that Barker draws on are chosen only from his own plays further isolating his arguments (*Ibid.*, p.283). Clave, moreover, describes Barker's writings as self-reflexive and without the ability to "escape the charge of being solipsistic attitudinizing [*sic*]" (*Ibid.*).

Robert Shaughnessy also believes that Barker's works features an egocentric approach. He mentions that even though actors such as Ian McDiarmid have claimed that Barker is an actor's writer, in real fact, they are the writer's actors (1989, p.266). Shaughnessy holds that Barker's attempt to be poetic verges on pretentiousness and self-indulgence (*Ibid.*). He concludes that Barker has become too authoritative a writer which is contradictory to his approach to theatre and therefore he calls for Barker's Barthesian authorial death (*Ibid.*, p.270).

Therefore, as discussed above, *Arguments for A Theatre* focuses mainly on the tragic aspect of Barker's theatre and the necessity of pain and death to create new thoughts through depicting alternatives to the happenings of the world beyond the one represented on stage. Barker's attention to laughter, humour and satire of his early plays is also confined to admitting that he has abandoned those techniques in his later plays. This research, however,

draws on Barker's *Arguments for A Theatre* and his plays to argue that Barker's statements and perceptions about his catastrophic theatre are not necessarily tragic and undisputable.

In other words, in approaching Barker's theatre, one might feel intimidated by the author's emphasis on tragedy and the necessity of a painful experience each individual audience must go through in emotional isolation from others. Despite Barker's seriousness in pursuing tragedy and death, the inherent humorous and comic components of his theatre are powerful enough to call for a close consideration albeit while overshadowed by anxiety, pain, death and eventually the whole concept of tragedy.

Barker's *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre* (2005) hermetically handles the essence of his work, "(self-) deceit that permits the confidence trick". In his work, "the recognition and admission of the immanence and inevitability of death becomes, not fatalistic or debilitating, but paradoxically vivifying, discovering an 'ecstasy' in the 'vanishing' of a conventionally dominant totalitarian meaning" (Barker, 2005, p.14). Barker argues that death, which has been eternal, cannot be depressing:

What was, is, and forever must be, cannot be *depressing*. Depression is a failure of the spirit. Who are the most depressed? The comedians. Fear is their territory. Tragedy fears nothing, it enters in, it must enter in, it senses this entering as an *ecstatic obligation* ... (Barker, 2005, p.81).

To further undermine the dominant social ideals, Barker draws on death, realises its potential and harnesses its power to create catastrophic situations. Barker's *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre* proposes:

... a vision of Tragedy, and its central compulsion to make dignities one's obsessions, which takes its cue from Nietzsche and Baudrillard, but project their explorations into more tightly focused, profoundly individual and unflinching admissions of encounters (both moral and erotic) which await all, yet are ultimately particular to each sensibility (Rabey, 2009, p.24).

In *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre*, Barker focuses on death and its cruciality. Barker's philosophical musings mesmerise the reader to desire for not only tragedy but also the experience of death. The *art of theatre* is described as infinite, functionless, intractable, nowhere, incalculable, illogical and arbitrary. He further mentions that these are the attributes of death (Barker, 2005, p.92).

The collection's refrain is that "All I describe is theatre even where theatre is not the subject" (Barker, 2005, p.2). Some of the statements are repeated regularly to increase their hypnotic effect so that readers finish reading them feeling faintly brainwashed. The playwright reiterates some of the points he had made regarding comedy and laughter in his *Arguments for A Theatre* which includes his assertion that dying societies laugh (Barker, 2005, p.80) and comedians are among the most depressed (Ibid, p.81). On one occasion Barker also admits the inevitability of laughter even amidst tragedy and explains that its function is to "implicate us in its seductive process" (Ibid., p.8). He, moreover, labels the peculiar laugh of tragedy as "The laugh on the rim of death (Ibid.).

Barker was concerned about the mainstream culture's moral dictations to the public through the populist and escapist theatre. Hence, his initiative to establish an Art of Theatre that without committing itself to conveying messages, depicts the "unhappened". Being tragic, not pessimist though, the Theatre of Catastrophe takes the audience out of their comfort zones to offer them a painful defamiliarised picture of their lives which is simultaneously beautiful.

Death, the One and the Art of Theatre, outlines the ideal of "the art of theatre" in death which is not valued outside the theatre. Adrian Curtin believes that Barker fails to explicate his theories in this volume of fragments and rather adumbrates. He adds that the main challenge of this book is "admitting death" which is the paramount challenge of Barker's tragic theatre. Curtin explains that Barker's "the one" as the third element of the book and argues that "*the one* is a name for a lover, but a deadly lover, who brings a potent combination of death and sexual ecstasy to the subject who suffers her (*the one* is feminized in the text)" adding that for Barker erotic transaction includes an intimation of death (2006, pp.166-167).

There are two major points with regard to this book by the playwright that relate to the current research. Firstly, Barker's focus on death, the importance of the experience of pain and the creation of tragedy contributes to the formation of grotesque images of life and death throughout his tragedies as will be discussed in the following chapters of this thesis. Secondly, intermittent references to laughter and admitting its occurrence during tragedy proves that this thesis has been established on solid grounds despite what it might seem at first. In other words, reading the collection of Barker's speculations on the art of theatre must not overwhelm one to take his entire tragic enterprise for granted.

So far, in the literature review, an effort was made to establish the Barkerian theoretical basis which is pivotal to understanding Barker's theatre. Another work of theory which dissects Barker's oeuvre is *A Style and Its Origins*, first published in 2007 and then in 2012. The book is an autobiographical investigation of Barker's theatre and its formation. In *A Style and Its Origins*, Howard Barker depicts his theatrical activities under the alter ego Eduardo Houth. Barker/Houth's objective manner of writing about the playwright's career includes facts about his childhood and references thereof in his plays, his relationships with actors and the establishment and naming of his theatre company, The Wrestling School. In this piece, Barker/Houth defines style as something which can be achieved through painful study, "a

distillation of thought and practice, and essentially a moral decision” (2012, Chapter 10). Further, Barker/Houth argues that “Barker’s staging became the moral element in an imaginative world that stressed its own immorality ...” (*Ibid.*).

In *A Style and Its Origins*, Barker/Houth describes the English society as disturbed and neurotic with an obsessive appetite for comedy (2012, Chapter 20). He further argues that:

Barker did not write comedy but had a profoundly comic sense as all tragedians do ... he was mischievous with his enemies whilst simultaneously taking pains to identify the profound schisms that lay inside theatre’s complacent tolerance (*Ibid.*).

The above-mentioned quote depicts Barker as disclaiming his sense of humour by acknowledging that all the tragedians possess such a comic sense. Ironically, Barker as a playwright with solid theories on a tragic theatre seems to be looking for accomplices in his writings which are filled with the comic sense. Confirming his sense of comedy, he appears uncomfortable with the gift. The current research, however, argues that perhaps Barker should not burden himself with the uneasiness of his strong sense of humour and comedy as it is even making a greater contribution to his 'art of theatre'. Moreover, in this critical piece, Barker distances himself from his artistic creations and defamiliarises his thoughts on theatre in order to be able to write critically on his own work. He emphasises therein the significance of seeing one's works of art from another aspect if one considers himself an artist.

The commentary on Barker's work also looks at Barker's need for The Wrestling School as he had made a few friends among critics, producers and directors unlike among actors. Barker admits that he was at the receiving end of political hostility from both the left and the right as

they were both united in their moral earnestness which hindered the shaping of a new theatre which was after (2012, p.n/a).

Barker's "On naturalism and its pretensions" is yet another significant article published in *Studies in Theatre and Performance* in 2007. It is indeed a paper, which was read by Howard Barker himself at the University of Exeter on 14 February 2007. In this essay, Barker uses Adorno's thoughts on art and literature as the greatest aesthetician whose theories on high culture lead to insights which are incompatible with "revolutionary practice" (Barker, 2007, p.289). Barker probes into a quote by Adorno that "Art is a form of knowledge; it expresses through its autonomy what is concealed by the empirical form of reality (Adorno, 1958 quoted in Barker, 2007, p.289). Barker highlights two concepts mentioned by Adorno, firstly, the autonomy of a serious work of arts and, secondly, the lack of coherence and objective transparency of reality which makes it even more ambiguous. Barker, therefore, argues that according to Adorno in the past century or even more, the naturalist or social-realist movement has chosen "a desperately insecure" ground to establish itself (*Ibid.*, p.290).

Barker abhors naturalism's claim to authenticity and its consequent moral distinction and mentions Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* as an example. He quotes Chekhov's "quaint assertions" that he only wrote down what he heard and did not create *Uncle Vanya* (Barker, 2007, p. 291). Naturalism's "banal rhythm and the poverty of discourse" are two of its outstanding characteristics for Barker (*Ibid.*). However, on the industrial scale, naturalistic drama is underpinned by accessibility and functionality. Contradicting empirical reality as discussed by Adorno, Barker draws attention to another reality which is hypothesis featured by speculation and experience rather than by revealing and saying (*Ibid.*, p.292). Thus, Barker defines tragedy as the art form which escapes projects of political nature and violates rules of causality:

There is however, substance in the darkness/light analogy that might be applied to tragedy and its opponents, for tragedy is not a project of enlightenment and educates nobody. Just as Brecht's epic theatre used white light both on the stage and in the auditorium to exterminate illusion and stimulate debate – and beyond debate, mutual surveillance – tragedy thrives on darkness and the isolation of the individual in a profoundly emotional experience in which a contrived language, delivered by a trained voice, is the medium of its illegality . . . and tragedy makes illegality its obsessive subject, putting morality into play as a conjuror keeps chrome rings revolving in the air (2007, p.293).

Finally, as manifestly stated by the playwright tragedy is the art which autonomously defies the clarity of empirical reality with its emphasis on imagination and novelty of language and performance. Having looked at Barker's works of theory, the next part of this literature review considers the studies carried out on Barker's theatre.

Theatre of Howard Barker has been studied through the lens of different critical approaches and philosophical concepts. As a prolific playwright and poet, he has attracted a wide range of criticism culminating in rich analysis of his work. Pioneering classical tragedy on the postmodern British stages, Barker's plays have been a subject of studies of tragedy. A very well scrutinised theme in Barker's oeuvre is tragedy, which is also acknowledged by the playwright.

One of the approaches taken in the study of Barker is through comparing his theatre to the work of playwrights such as Bertolt Brecht and Edward Bond. In order to discover what Barker's theatre is, in his *Theatre of Howard Barker* (2005), Lamb studies what Barker's theatre is not. Finding Barker's classification difficult, Lamb argues that in the seventies he was considered as a leftist playwright along with Bond, Brenton and Edgar; however, from the early eighties onward observed Barker as a playwright shifting from the political to the personal (Lamb, 2005, pp.5-6).

Falling out of the Brechtian rational theatre, Barker "presents a de-centred, purely relational world which goes beyond the quiescent fantasies of realism without the support of any authorising discourses" (Lamb, 2005, p.41). It is crucial to understand the main characteristics of the Brechtian theatre to be able to study the theatre of Howard Barker. The Brechtian theatre emphasises on the importance of the reality principle, an element of academism which means processing the raw material and feeding the audience with it and an explicit manifestation of authoritarianism in the sense that theatre must conform to authoritarian prescriptions to be allowed (*Ibid.*, pp.19-20).

Lamb maintains that the main challenge that Barker plays posed to directors was that his texts could not be analysed through the traditional directorship, which was deeply rooted in Brecht, Stanislavsky and social realism (Lamb, 2005, p.21). Barker's dislocation of his characters through catastrophe was labelled as unreal for the reason that a minority of the people experience disastrous incidents such as war, or terrorist incidents. The playwright intended to deviate from the common and accepted assumptions and to move towards "the characteristic ambiguities and sheer suspense of drama" (*Ibid.*, p.21).

It is my view that Barker's theatrical approach came at a time that the Brechtian epic method tended to "negate the suspense element by presenting the action in historical form so that audiences may focus on the 'how' rather than the 'what?'" (Lamb, 2005, p.21). To that end, Lamb argues that:

Perhaps the central irony of the whole 'rational' rhetoric focuses on Brecht's contention – also propounded by Bond – that the field of culture lags behind the development of the physical sciences ... relativity revolved almost a century ago (*Ibid.*, pp.22-23).

Under such circumstances Barker deemed it necessary to make his voice heard and consequently started writing an article entitled 'Forty Asides for a Tragic Theatre' which was published in *The Guardian* in 1986 and which culminated in writing *Arguments for a Theatre* in 1989. Lamb argues that Barker's theatre "aims at *disclosure* – an opening, an expression that assumes a continuation of dialogue and likewise a continuation of the process of meaning (2005, p.37).

Lamb is of the view that as Bond and Edgar follow the Brechtian theatrical method, Barker's theatre also shares common grounds with Peter Szondi's 'Modern Drama'. Szondi, therefore, considers "drama as a device for providing a perspective on the human. Particularly important is relegation of the world of objects" (Lamb, 2005, p.36). Drama, according to Szondi, is not tasked with representing reality; it is rather, reality and takes place in the present; consequently, performers must not be distinguished from roles as Brecht advocated (*Ibid.*, p.37). Therefore, Barker's plays tend to set a group of characters within a scenario that they then proceed to work out. The scenario is inevitably distanced for both the audience and the characters themselves:

Usually the circumstances are either catastrophic or immediately post-catastrophic, because, as I have already suggested, such ruptures dispense with the normalising, reassuring, socially enforced patterns of daily existence that we take for reality (Lamb, 2005, p.38).

In short, according to Lamb the nature of Barker's dramatic model which can be briefly described as dialectical and relational, must inescapably be expressed in dialogue; hence, the paramountcy of language for Barker (Lamb, 2005, p.38). Drawing on the possibilities of the language, actors must also immerse themselves in their roles to "*seduce* the audience into the

emotional life of the plays” (*Ibid.*, p.42). Seduction serves as the heart of Barker’s theatre; “it is the play of subjects in which the subject disappears” (*Ibid.*).

Charles Lamb studies seduction in relation to Barker's plays and categories in three broad groups, namely, the direct seduction of the audience, seduction within the action of plays and seduction of language. Lamb explains that under normal circumstances, seduction is associated with intentional attempts in order to win sexual favours; however, in deconstructive readings where seduction appears frequently, it gains a wider and well-specified framework (Lamb, 2005, p.43). “Seduction is that which extracts meaning from discourse and detracts it from its truth” (Baudrillard, 1988, quoted in Lamb, 2005, p.43).

Interrogating the meaning of reason, legitimacy, truth and authority is among the major concerns of deconstructive discourse (Lamb, 2005, p.46), as Lamb observes that Baudrillard advances the theoretical hypothesis that seduction is the ultimate ‘reality’ in the sense that it encompasses all ‘truth’ discourses – the image and paradigm of which he sees in the process of Production (*Ibid.*).

As a result, seduction must be repressed by the world of production. Lamb explains that Barker’s theatre handles issues related to "the Other" through non-authoritarian modes. He argues that although Barker engages with power relations, especially when they intersect with the personal, he does not depict his character relations through the lens of authorised discourses (Lamb, 2005, p.47). The same lack of attention to the authorised systems of morality applies to Barker’s theatre. Barker describes his theatre as a-moral, however, in his works, “the ethical finds its focus in the relation with the other” (*Ibid.*, p.48):

When Barker talks of restoring to the theatre the task of moral speculation, it would appear that his concern is to investigate what happens to individuals who commit themselves to particular courses of action or strategies – very often conventional transgressions or violations. In this sense his characters are usually

explorers who are not content to live their lives within the parameters of received social wisdom and morality. Their dilemmas are resolved not by reference to social norms but instinctively (*Ibid.*).

Lamb argues that Howard Barker's theatre seeks to challenge truth-based discourses through their "divergence from 'truth/reality/authenticity principles'" (2005, p.49). He further advances the notion that the leading acting and production discourses such as those of Stanislavsky, Brecht and Grotowski *et al* can be said to depend on the above-mentioned reality-based discourses (*Ibid.*). Consequently, these principles could not be deployed to stage Barker's plays. The challenge Barker poses by his disruption of well-established theatrical practices renders his theatre a ground for ambiguity, scenes of becoming and new challenges which this study focuses on. By highlighting these features of Barker's theatre this research investigates Barker's use of comedy at the service of his Theatre of Catastrophe.

Lamb contends that Barker's theatre features a generalisation of seduction processes. He does not recommend seduction as the essence of Barker's theatre or as an alternative ideology; however, he elaborates that seduction as a precondition which informs the audience's reading of Barker. Lamb draws on Baudrillard to explicate some of the processes of seduction. The secret and the common-sense thinking account for two of the important processes of seduction (2005, pp.49-50). Lamb adds that "[i]n order to seduce, it is necessary that one be seduced oneself; being seduced is very seductive" (*Ibid.*, p.50). Further aspects of seduction encompass "challenge, the duel/dual relation, vertigo, madness, the suspension of normal constraints and the substitution of a pact, the obligation to exceed" (*Ibid.*, p.51).

Lamb's major argument is that the catastrophic conditions under which Barker's plays are set empowers Barker to isolate his characters from "normalising structures of social and economic interdependency"; therefore, allowing them to show an unlimited range of

behaviour. Baudrillard holds that catastrophe “abolishes causality” (Lamb, 2005, p.53). Therefore, catastrophe features a world in which causality is abandoned. Consequently, Lamb contends that in a world where causality rules crises happen but not catastrophe. Therefore, “In the world of seduction, however, there are no accidents and there is no chance: everything is destiny. This is what, in the rational world, gives the accidental its peculiar seductive charm” (*Ibid.*). Lamb proceeds to identify three types of seduction in relation to Barker’s theatre of catastrophe; namely, direct seduction of the audience, seduction with the action of the plays, and seduction of language (*Ibid.*, pp.54-69).

Direct seduction of the audience is a tone set by Barker in the late 1980s and 1990s in which Barker uses the active performance/passive audience model. The audience is directly in a prologue; during his interaction "a highly vocal character confronts another character who remains silent (Lamb, 2005, p.54). The importance of the seduction lies in the fact that it offers an alternative to replace the "manipulative, controlling relation that characterises communication in our society" (*Ibid.*, p.56). One of the pillars of Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe is suggesting an alternative to life as it currently is. He is concerned with putting forward possibilities for a new life, which would be free from any external controlling powers. The carnival shares this objective with seduction in the sense that it offers and alternative life to its participants albeit for a short while. This current research will look at Barker's oeuvre through this very significant vantage point. Central to this study's argument is the influence of ephemeral moments of carnival on Barker's characters.

Therefore, Lamb states that the seductive relation is a mutual relation in the sense that it engages "subject/Other" rather than "subject/object" (2005, p.56). Taking this into account the seductive relation revolves around interaction. The study of Barker's theatre through the lens of seduction sheds light on the cruciality of the audience and their intellectual engagement in Barker's theatre.

Lamb explains that this type of seduction occurs in plays such as *Don't Exaggerate* and *The Bite of the Night* (2005, p.55). The second type of seduction, seduction within the action of the play, is explicit but indirect meaning that "character A's seduction of character B can indirectly seduce the audience" (*Ibid.*, p.57). Examples of this type of seduction occur in *Cheek* (1970), *Claw* (1975), *Stripwell* (1975) and *Fair Slaughter* (1977). With regard to *Claw* and *Stripwell*, Lamb argues that:

[...] speech seductions or attempted speed seductions in particularly extreme circumstances make up the crucial dramatic episode of these plays. These attempts at an extreme reversal all have in common the aim of deflecting or diverting another from their established truth (2005, p.57).

The third type of seduction, which Lamb recognises in Barker's theatre, is seduction of language.

In the second part of his in-depth investigation into Barker's theatre, Charles Lamb focuses on the playwright's oeuvre from the viewpoint of the audience (2005, p.158). Howard Barker celebrates the unlive potentials which life can offer. His work also edges on the thoughts which are not allowed and the behaviour, which is widely or socially, deemed as immoral. Barker's audience must be willing to go through pain in order to gain experience. Lamb believes that the pain that the audience is supposed to be inflicted with comes indirectly through the actor's "seductive magic" (*Ibid.*, p.159).

To put social relations in terms of seduction, Barker replaces them with solitudes or dual relations. Moreover, he offers pacts for the law (Lamb, 2005, p.159). Examples of such pacts can be located in Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* where, for instance, Helena and Vanya speak of a suicide pact. Therefore, Barker successfully forms an atmosphere which highlights the

seductive effect of killing and its consequent enlivening of characters (*Ibid.*, p.181). Lamb believes that in (*Uncle*) *Vanya*, Chekhov whose laughter has become a threadbare reflex resorts to death which according to Baudrillard is a means of seduction (*Ibid.*, p.183).

Likewise, death and the grotesque body play a prominent part in the research underway. The dominance of death cannot be denied in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe taking into account its tragic nature. The current research overlaps with Lamb's study of Barker's theatre. Lamb's study of the audience, the language and the significance of the body and concepts such as death aimed at seducing also relate to this research on Barker in the sense that the body and corporeal concerns as well as issues related to mortality occupy a central role in the carnivalesque which will be studied in relation to Barker's theatre in the next chapters.

As proved by Lamb (2005), Howard Barker employs different tools in order to counterpoint any controlling force which seeks to impose itself upon human being and its free flow of thoughts leading to un-interrupted actions and behaviour. This is the position taken by the thesis as it will be discussed in this thesis the extreme circumstances that Barker makes his characters, actors and finally audience experience leads to epiphanies in the lives of everybody who is engaged with his works. It will be discussed that, as also mentioned by Lamb, Barker employs different techniques to reach his end in his theatre.

Howard Barker: Ecstasy and Death: An Expository Study of his Drama, Theory and Production Work, 1988–2008 (2009) is the continuation of Rabey's study of Barker's plays from 1969-1978. Rabey offers an in-depth investigation of Barker's plays of this period and describes Barker's theatre as a speculative drama which is characterised by estrangement and surprising reversal which leads to an abandonment of moral preaching or practice. Rabey also contextualises the theatre of the period in the socio-political climate of the day. Rabey explains that Barker opposed the popular theatre which Thatcherism promoted in spite of

embracing anti-consensus policies and self-determination. Rabey mentions that Barker placed his elitism in imagination which was available to all classes instead of economic gain (2009, p.21). Another significant point which Rabey discusses is that Barker is a revolutionary and political playwright but not a prescriptive one (*Ibid.*, p.5). This argument contradicts Barker's own rejection of being labelled as a political playwright. Consequently, it is inevitable not to consider Barker as a political playwright especially studying plays such as *Claw* and *Stripwell* (*Ibid.*).

A very significant aspect of Barker's theatre which Rabey studies in his research is the "uncanny" which pertains to the de-familiarisation of the familiar by revealing the hidden (2009, p.6). In the process of de-familiarisation, Barker's characters, would rather personally explore the outer world and gain knowledge than submit to the received knowledge. Barker historically, politically, culturally and morally contextualises the uncanny to create dramatic works which are "catastrophically disturbing and individuating" and which uncompromisingly rebuke the notion that "domesticity, sentimentality and populist collectivism" can defend the "dismissal of the specifics of humanity" (*Ibid.*).

The arguments put forward by Rabey majorly differ from the course and concern of the current research; however, they shed light on aspects of Barker's theatre, which are essential to any study of the playwright's oeuvre regardless of the theoretical frame thereof. Yet, another significant study by Rabey which provides insight into the bigger picture of the contemporary British theatre and where Barker's theatre fit in is *English Drama Since 1940* (2003).

In the afore-mentioned research, Rabey emphasises on the importance of the playwrights such as Howard Barker who have been left out of the mainstream theatre. Rabey seeks to

identify what he believes to be the important examples of the fictional drama, which interrogates the conventional notion of social consensus and determinism.

Rabey acknowledges and argues for the fact that there has often been a deliberation involved in drama's working, being annexed or invoked for both social consensus and social determinism (p.1), and continues to argue that even tragic drama can be interpreted as carrying a sense of deterministic inevitability. Rabey asserts that the post-war form of modern classic drama is frequently identified with Chekhov's ironic tragedies, which "sympathetically observe lost chance, missed opportunity, the sterility of self-defeating self-preoccupation and entropy" (2003, p.1). However, unlike the Chekhovian drama which reacts to the Russian mood in a specific time span, the British and Irish neo-Chekhovian drama "claims for itself an authoritative timeless wisdom (or even absolution) in renunciation of resistance to inevitabilities" (*Ibid.*, p.2). Rabey's argument affirms the point of departure for this research which is Barker's reworking of Chekhov's dramaturgy. Rabey argues that Barker has tried to "reclaim language from a sense of social crisis expressed as social determinism" (*Ibid.*, p.182).

Rabey in his study emphasises on the momentousness of drama in re-shaping power in the socio-political context. He argues that drama has been used to serve the purposes of a range of political spectra including the most extreme ones. Especially of importance to this current research is Rabey's investigation of 'mega-musicals' of the 1980s and 1990s as a remarkable example of what he terms as consensual form. Rabey elaborates that the so-called mega-musicals offers its audience "a re-assuredly predetermined experience, in which extravagant spectacle reflects the supposedly triumphant marriage of enterprise materialism and populist sentimentality" (2003, p.1). Musicals became popular on the British stage for their "celebration of energy, expansiveness and simplicity" (*Ibid.*, p.7).

Rabey therefore adds that this situation paved the way for the entrance of the American musicals such as *Annie Get Your Gun* (1977), *South Pacific* (1950) and *Guys and Dolls* (1953) to the British stages (2003, p.8). The hatred of dramatists such as Howard Barker and David Edgar for musicals is deeply rooted in the context in which such plays appeared. As it will be discussed later in this research, the rise of Thatcherism, with its emphasis on "a consensual moral authority" (*Ibid.*, p.115), made musicals and plays which promoted unity among the audience more welcome. This argument is central to Barker's theories of theatre as stipulated in his *Arguments for A Theatre* and as well will be discussed later.

This research by Rabey consequently makes a great contribution to the thesis at hand in terms of confirming its main argument. Contextualisation of tenets of Barker's theatre of catastrophe with its non-reconciliatory approach is highly important to the current study. The current research, however, draws on other aspects of Barker's work as will be discussed to argue how Barker's works differ from both the mainstream theatre and his contemporaries' oeuvre.

In 2003, Michael Patterson added a very important voice to the body of research on British drama through *Strategies of Political Theatre, Post-war British Playwrights*. Patterson's research remains one of the important works on British drama and specifically, on political theatre. Patterson dedicates his book to the study of the works of the generation of the post-war British playwrights who are famous for their historical and political plays. This generation, Patterson argues, mainly inclined towards the politics of the left and Marxist criticism; however, their dreams were shattered with the installation of the conservative government of Margaret Thatcher in 1970. This tradition was the result of the tendency of the 20th century theatre towards the political issues in order to challenge the old modes of thought.

Patterson primarily argues that the socialist-realist drama and the agitation-propaganda theatre that, although among the primary modes of political drama, were not very appropriate for the more in-depth exploration of the political issues. Therefore, playwrights turned into “conventional modes of the Western theatrical discourse” which is broadly divided into the two strands of the reflectionist and the interventionist (Patterson, 2003, p.14).

Patterson primarily argues that the reflectionist tradition asserts that art should reflect the reality by holding up a mirror to the nature. The followers of this tradition believed in the Aristotelian notion of mimesis. The interventionist tradition, however, argues that even though it would be possible to reflect the reality as it is, it is the task of the artists to come up with their own interpretations of reality and to “challenge of perception of it” (Patterson, 2003, p.14). One of the most major modernist playwrights to use the interventionist technique was Bertolt Brecht.

As far as the post-war British playwrights are concerned, some of them chose the reflectionist strain of realism as it furnished them with the possibility of depicting a world which was a familiar world with recognisable injustice. On the other hand, other playwrights of the 1970s preferred the interventionist strain to be able to draw on the possibilities it proffered in analysing “the causes of injustice” (Patterson, 2003, p.24). Analysing Barker's *Stripwell*, Patterson categorises Barker as a reflectionist playwrights. Taking into account that *Stripwell* is an early play by Barker which is satirical and comic, this analysis might be well justified; however, a thorough consideration of Barker's oeuvre proves Patterson wrong. In this thesis, it will be argued that even in his most orthodox pieces, Barker presents de-familiarising elements which foreshadows his theory of catastrophism. Classifying him as a reflectionist playwright does not do justice to his contributions to the British theatre. Barker even transcends the boundaries of the interventionist tradition by creating a new perspective for theatre which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Outlining the political, historical and cultural background of the eighties in *Thatcher's Theatre: British Theatre and Drama in the Eighties* (1999), Keith D. Peacock studies the British drama against the existing discourses of the age. In Peacock's critical opinion, Thatcherism considered theatre as "an entertainment industry that was otherwise irrelevant to the workings of society" (1999, p.125). Therefore, against this antagonistic approach to theatre, the playwrights not only survived during the eighties but also produced some of the best contemporary plays of the British drama.

Peacock's research directly studies the influence of Thatcherism on the British theatre, especially leftist playwrights. The two major arguments of the book are "the transformation of the discourse of leftist theatre and the much-discussed crisis in funding which resulted from Thatcher's *laissez faire* policies as well as her assault on the welfare state" (Gardner, 2000, p.585). Peacock argues that the unexpected cuts by the Arts Council during the first year of the Conservative Parliament foreshadowed the detrimental effects of Margaret Thatcher's economic policies on the subsidised theatre (1999, p.1). Peacock further explains that the British political theatre of the 1970s dismissed the principles of the realistic plays of the mainstream theatre (1999, p.6). Consequently, in order to address the issues of their concern, the leftist playwrights could choose among three alternatives, namely agitprop, social realism and musical political documentary. Peacock also states that one of the core characteristics of the left-wing theatre was to pursue new theatrical and dramatic discourses (*Ibid.*, pp.7-9).

Welfare State was a company which adopted "the subversive, spectacular, and celebratory features of such popular theatrical traditions as Carnival, the Feast of Fools, the fairground and the mummers' play" (Peacock, 1999, p.115). Peacock believes that the Welfare State was not successful in offering critique of the right-wing cultural policies. Although Peacock studies the concerns and responses of the left-wing theatre to Thatcherism in his study, he

does not focus on the works of Howard Barker. Despite this, his contextualisation of Thatcher's economic policies and politics in the theatrical environment sheds light on Barker's responses to the mainstream theatrical trends. For example, it will be discussed in later chapters that the form which Barker chose for his theatre does not correspond to any of the above-mentioned alternatives available to the left-wing theatre vis-à-vis the realistic plays favoured by the mainstream theatre. Barker rather takes the initiative to write his own theories for theatre that is catastrophism.

Theatre of Catastrophe: New Essays on Howard Barker (2007) is a collection of fourteen essays and an interview with Howard Barker. The essay collection majorly concentrates on Barker's theory of theatre that is catastrophism. Confirming Barker's reading of his oeuvre, the series of articles seldom dispute the tragic aspect of Barker's theatre. They rather study his oeuvre through the lens of theories such as those of Kristeva, Barthes, Baudrillard, Bataille, Blanchot, Lyotard, Adorno, Burke, Kant, Nietzsche and Levinas and focus on themes such as sexuality, desire, ecstasy, individual will, criminality and death in Barker's theatre of catastrophe. The essays do not, nonetheless, probe into the neglected area of Barker's humour and comedy.

Rabey in "Raising hell", the first essay of a series of fourteen essays on Barker's *Theatre of Catastrophe*, studies Barker's theatre against theories by Baudrillard, Greenblatt, Kristeva and Hans-Thies Lehmann. He investigates the concepts of seduction, which was also previously studied by Charles Lamb (2005), self-fashioning, abjection and post-dramatic theatre. Rabey summarises the dynamics of Barker's theatre by referring to the individual solitudes which are intertwined in his works and seek to demonstrate the impact of "theatricality and performance of political obsessions" on our most intimate moments and thoughts (2006, p.27).

As in the majority of research on Howard Barker's theatre, this essay confirms and emphasises on Howard Barker's abandonment of naturalism in his theatre through an "anti-naturalistic expansion" of whatever experience the characters are designed to live including but not limited to language, expression, modes of existence, loving and acting. Above all, Barker's theatre seeks to put forward "a deeper imaginative opposition to society through speculation involving a questioning relief from prevalent social ideals" (Rabey, 2006, p.13).

At the beginning of his essay, Rabey, therefore, establishes the technical terms one needs to be familiar with when reading Barker's plays or conducting a research on his works. These terms include exploration of possibilities, non-acceptance of prevalent social and moral norms, importance of imagination and stopping to look for messages in Barker's plays. Rabey undertakes to categorise Barker's playwriting into different stages. He describes the early stage of his work, from 1975 to 1983, as the period when the playwright favoured plays which "were muscular, savagely comic attacks on the promises of social authority" (*Ibid.*, p.14).

In a very significant argument, Rabey describes expressionism as a tenet on which Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe is based. He further introduces *The Bite of the Night* as "a unique form of poetic theatre" (Rabey, 2006, p.15). Rabey mainly focuses on Barker's restlessness as a poet in this early stage of his work which results in shaping of his new drama. To briefly summarise Barker's theatre, one can refer to Rabey's description "classical discipline, visual imagery and moral ruthlessness" (*Ibid.*, p.16). Rabey acknowledges Lamb's research on Barker's theatre in the light of Jean Baudrillard's theory of seduction which was discussed earlier in the literature review. He, consequently, maintains that "Baudrillard's account of the process and dynamics of seduction might also serve as a description of the duels at the centre of Barker's dramas, their struggles for terms of power and sexuality" (*Ibid.*, p.17).

Theories of self-fashioning by Stephen Greenblatt are also employed by Rabey to shed light on other aspects of Barker's theatre which are concerned with the playwright's "imaginings, and increasing control of the theatrical production, of his dramatic works" (Rabey, 2006, p.20). Explaining Greenblatt's theory, Rabey mentions that during the Renaissance self-consciousness about shaping the human identity raised. As such, the Renaissance was marked by a negotiation between the experienced being shaped by uncontrollable social, political and cultural forces and the effort to form one's identity (*Ibid.*, p.19). Further in his essay, Rabey offers an insight into Barker's plays through the lens of Kristeva's conception of abjection. In Rabey's words, abjection is "[t]he perfect process whereby the symbolism of a dominant social system tries to exclude some embarrassing possibility comes back, even more compulsively, to call the prevailing notion of (im)possibility into question" (*Ibid.*, p.20).

Having introduced Kristeva's Abject, Rabey further studies Barker's *The Early Hours of a Reviled Man* (1990) and describes the play as "a jet-black comedy of abjection and contamination" whose protagonist, Sleen, a doctor and a prominent novelist, has pursuers who embody subjects seeking to distance themselves from Sleen's "unforgivably questioning presence"; however, they discover that Sleen's presence continues to challenge or eliminate their boundaries; yet, they are incapable of killing him (2006, *Ibid.*, p.22).

Barker's reworking of classical texts such as Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, Shakespeare's *King Lear* and Thomas Middleton's *Women Beware Women* to some extent highlights how he is influenced by classical traditions of painting. Rabey elaborates on these painting traditions as being the artists' intention to both pay homage to old subject matters and themes such as crucifixion, and images from classical myths and epics as well as developing new arguments from old themes and topics (2006, p.23). Therefore, Barker's idea and projects of reworking old matter are celebrated.

It is finally paramount to note how Barker seeks to establish his theatrical theories along with his performance policies and techniques in order to explore the possibilities which are otherwise ignored by the conventional collective experience and modes of performance. He constantly encourages his audience to see and act beyond the norms set for them mainly by the political clichés and obsessions. One of the important essays in *Theatre of Catastrophe: New Essays on Howard Barker*, is the one written by James Reynolds which studies Barker's use of directorial practices and dramaturgical framework in order to interpret his aesthetics from the text to the stage. Reynolds argues that Barker's "deliberate foregrounding of the irrational in the transgressive acts which are at the core of his writing for the theatre" (2006, p.56). Barker possesses and practices a strict policy in his directing wherein details and exactitude play a major role. In the same line, Barker requires his actors to show technical ability, will and speech; he does not mind if they are not philosophically sophisticated or familiar with his arguments (*Ibid.*, p.57).

This essay opens a new window to Barker's attitude toward staging his plays. Emphasising on the significance of anxiety in the production of Barker's plays and creating this feeling in the audience, Reynolds argues that in having anxiety as the mother of principle of his theatre, Barker's dramaturgical framework is comparable to that of Samuel Beckett. He adds that, "they both employ a conscious indeterminacy of meaning, avoiding clarity or didacticism in favour of an 'anxious' theatre in which the creation of anxiety in the spectator is the total of all value" (2006, p.62).

As such, an important point which Reynolds establishes is that as much as Barker evades conclusions and meaning in his texts, he even does more so in his dramaturgy. It is true that he directs his plays; still it does not amount to offering interpretations to actors who have problem understanding his texts. He leaves it to discussion and up to the specific actor to decide what something mean (*Ibid.*, pp.66-67).

Reynolds further argues that by creating a surreal pre-performance, Barker brings about anxiety in his plays. He explains that the purpose of exordium, which the playwright defines as a surreal action which opens all the works of *The Wrestling School*, in a letter to Reynolds, is to foreground "Aspects of the text with a scenographic boldness, announcing and intense focus and disabling realistic registers of interpretation" (2006, p.67). He adds that (*Uncle Vanya*'s exordium consisted of a raised walkway which characters mounted while they were carrying "metal trays kitchenware" they then stop at the top of the walkway and drop the items down to the stage attacking the audience's nervous system noisily "creating the destined status of anxiety very quickly" (*Ibid.*). Through his investigation of Barker's approach to staging his works, Reynolds highlights how Barker makes benefit of language, lack of clarity and sounds among other things to create a strong sense of anxiety in the audience.

In his essay in the collection entitled "England brings you down at last': Politics and Passion in Barker's 'State of England' Drama"(2006), to contextualise Barker's work in the 1970s, Chris Megson argues that Barker's plays which were written in the 1970s voice his disappointment "at the failures and squandered opportunities of the British Left ..." (pp.126-127). The playwright's milestone works of the 1970s include *Claw* (1975), *That Good Between Us* (1977), *The Love of a Good Man* (1978), *The Hang of the Gaol* (1978), and *Downchild* which was written in the 1977 but was not staged until 1985. Megson argues that:

Barker's procedure in these plays is to elaborate a scenario for the dramatic action that renders the hermetic and parochial nature of English society in terms of the suffocating effects of its stagnant institutions on individual subjects, who are themselves often trapped within opposing polarities of the class system. In this respect, his work is responsive to widespread anxieties at this time about the inefficiency and decline of Britain's institutional structure (*Ibid.*, 127).

Megson highlights the importance of the critique of British institutions and their crippling influence over British people's lives in Barker's theatre. It is impossible to separate Barker's works from the socio-political context in which they were produced. Among the plays which Megson mentions, *Claw* and *The Love of a Good Man* feature carnival characteristics and render themselves to such a reading which will be discussed in the next chapters. The essays, however, mainly focus on the tragic, or catastrophic aspect of Barker's theatre, without heeding to the comic details which are interspersed in the playwright's oeuvre.

In his 2004 comparative study of contemporary British dramatists and Romantic poets, *With the Lamp in Distorted Mirrors*, Behzad Ghaderi investigates the legacy of romanticism in the postmodern British dramatic literature by studying the works of Howard Barker/ S.T. Coleridge, Edward Bond/William Wordsworth, Caryl Churchill/Joanna Baillie, Howard Brenton/P.B. Shelley, Roger Howard/Lord Byron. Ghaderi draws an apparently impossible analogy between the works and theories of S.T. Coleridge and Howard Barker only to prove the existence of similarities between the two antagonizing writers. Ghaderi considers Barker as one of the English neo-Jacobean dramatists with whom Coleridge took issues in his time (2004, p.256) and argues that Barker can be recognised as the English version of George Bernard Shaw (*Ibid.*, p.155).

Ghaderi contends that both Coleridge and Barker emphasise on the significance of the imagination and the engagement of the imagination of not only actors but also spectators. Through this emphasis both Barker and Coleridge believe in and necessitate the exploration of these territories of life which have been inaccessible to people. They seek to provoke the individual among the spectators and to communicate with him/her. Group reaction and communal understanding of their plays by the audience are far from being desired by them (Ghaderi, 2004, pp.158-159). Ghaderi further explains that ambiguity and refraining from giving messages are two other common features of the works by the two poets/playwrights.

Ghaderi believes that these post-modern British dramatists experienced the same failure of idealism albeit in different ages. They, therefore, seek subversive strategies for their theatres and through their uncompromising approaches to politics and arts re-define the boundaries of imagination and create new dramatic styles.

1.3.2.2. Essays

In order to review the most recent and relevant essays written on Howard Barker's art of theatre, I have considered it prudent to categorise the essays into three major groups. The first group consists of essays which adopt a holistic approach to Barker's theatre through offering insight into some of his specific plays. The second group concerns itself with an exploration into the staging of Barker's plays. The third group, however, offers a study of Barker's works in the larger context of the contemporary British drama.

As it can be expected, the essays written on Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe outnumber other categories' essays. None with standing, it is crucial to study the above-mentioned categories in order to establish the originality of the current research. I will look at the articles of each category based on the chronological order of their publication starting with the most recent ones.

Essays on Barker's Art of Theatre

In what can be described as one of the latest body of research conducted on Howard Barker's theatre, Karoline Gritzner studies Barker's late-style in the light of the playwright's approach to nature (stone and land to be more specific) by examining two of his latest plays entitled "Immense Kiss" (2018) and "Critique of Pure Feeling" (2018). Applying theories by Deleuze and Adorno, Gritzner looks at the notion of crisis which presents itself "as a permanent force

of dissolution and reification" compared to its former feature of "singular rupture" (2020, p.100).

Gritzner argues that the romantic relationship which exists between young men and old ladies in these plays embodies nonhuman nature. Investigating Barker's late-style, Gritzner brings into light absolutely new aspects of Barker's recent plays and consequently late-style. One such aspect is materiality (represented by land and stone) and "an infinite yearning of the self" which Gritzner terms "the crisis of becoming-nature" (*Ibid.*, p.101). She then explores how becoming-nature amounts to losing agency and autonomy and "a redefinition of subjective crisis as a perpetual force that emanates from the non-human planes of existence" before changing the idea of human (*Ibid.*, pp.101-102).

Through this argument, Gritzner concludes that in Barker's recent plays the characters' crisis goes beyond an individual unstable dramatic situation and is rather resultant from an impersonal or transpersonal life force which evades human agency. It is therefore, interesting how in his recent plays Barker seems to be renouncing the very human agency he believed in while writing his early plays some of which will be studied later in this research.

Another significant finding of Gritzner's study is that "there is no way out of the contradictions of his dramatic imaginary worlds" (*Ibid.*, p.111). This is therefore, a very ironic situation in Barker's late-style. Finally, Gritzner discusses how reconciliation becomes the final gesture in Barker's plays. These two statements by Gritzner portray the picture of a playwright whose style drastically differs from Barker's style which is studied in this research. Nonetheless, one should consider that developments in a writer's style or revisions of his/her thoughts are an essential aspect of creative thinking and writing.

A very recent article which seeks to fill the gap in literary research on Howard Barker's theatre is Parisa Shams' "Transgression Unbound: Subjectivity and Subversion in Howard

Barker's *The Castle*" (2017). Shams studies one of the most significant themes in Barker's theatre which is the theme of subjectivity and how it turns into a means at the service subversion. Shams draws on Judith Butler's theories of "sexual identity and its performative nature in relation to the normative conditions of its emergence" (p.124). Juxtaposing Barker's transgressive subjectivity as presented in *The Castle* with Butler's anti-humanist approach to subjectivity, Shams thoroughly analyses the character of Ann in the above-mentioned play. In Barker's theatre, Shams argues, not only erotic desire serves as a tool for exercising agency but also it interacts with the transgression of moral and social orders (p.125).

Rejecting the notion of autonomous identity, Butler advocates the idea of identity which is "performatively constituted and holds that a subject's agency resides in its ability to vary the repetition of discursive social norms" (Shams, 2017, p.125). Through an analysis of Ann's complicated character, Shams proves the power of women in the play not only to subvert the male predominance and the patriarchal system, but also to make the same system work to the detriment of the male ruling.

It is interesting to notice how Shams' work relates to the current research at hand in the sense that they both investigate the elements through which Barker's characters show agency and seek to subvert the power of the ruling as well as the power of the norms and conventions practised and imposed by the society. However, the lens through which Shams' essay carries out its objective differs from the theories upon which the current research draws.

Alireza Fakhrkonandeh offers an insight into the conception of death in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe "as essentially inscrutable, being at once phenomenon and nonphenomenon" (2016, p.365). Fakhrkonandeh draws on Schopenhauer's thoughts on the crucial role of death in human life and argues that through apparent preoccupation with the issue of nihilism, Barker's drama makes its melancholic strain apparent (*Ibid.*, p.367). In this essay,

Fakhrkonandeh suggests that ontological, existential and aesthetic melancholia exist in Barker's drama as a premise. He further argues that for Barker, ontological melancholia results from "what Kristeva calls a nonsymbolizeable [sic.] and non/pre-objected thing, which can variously be construed in terms of God, the (m)other, or an indefinite not-yet-arrived, ideal other (person or world) which is regarded as always already and irretrievably lost" (*Ibid.*, pp.369-370). Through his study of Barker's plays including *Found in the Ground*, *The Last Supper*, *Early Hours of a Reviled Man*, *Golgo*, and finally *13 Objects*, Fakhrkonandeh identifies the ethical and ontological dimensions of Barker's melancholia.

Another aspect of Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe which has been explored by Fakhrkonandeh in a 2014 essay is not only indicative of the importance of the play *Gertrude the Cry* (2002) for Barker's dramatic career but also for the playwright's personal life. "The Acousmatic Voices as the Chiasmatic Flesh: An Analysis of Howard Barker's *Gertrude the Cry*" (2014) focuses mainly on the cry as "the eccentric centre of the play" rather than Gertrude as the source of the cry. The author also juxtaposes between the Deleuzian conceptions of art as the possible form of experience and art as the reflection of experience with Barker's relationships with actresses Victoria Wicks and Marcia Pointon and the resulted developments in their private lives.

Fakhrkonandeh continues to establish his argument that perceives the cry as not only an expression of the "Impossibles" but also as an event which is unrepeatable (2014, p.224). He explains how Barker handles the moments of Impossibilities by firstly introducing the cry as a-phenomenon and a-form and secondly by assigning these features as acousmatic and proximal (*Ibid.*, p.243). In order to explain an acousmatic voice, Fakhrkonandeh refers to the definition provided by Chion and Dolar and mentions that it is a voice the source and cause of which are "indefinite, undecidable and unknown" (*Ibid.*, p.248).

Emphasising on Barker's undermining of Aristotle's notion of catharsis, Roberts (2014) argues that Barker believes in the necessity of witnessing pain of others as well as our own pain. He focuses on the language of pain and how for Barker "pain necessitates the struggle to find a language that transforms suffering into poetry" (2014, p.263). It is argued how despite being unimaginable, death makes poetry possible and renders Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe necessary.

In his plethoric theatre, Barker seeks to discover and explore new possibilities; hence, Barker's disengagement from the typical mimetic paradigm which is characteristic of theatrical art (Roberts, 2014, p.264). With reference to Barker's play *Blok/Eko*, Roberts concludes that it is impossible to represent death through art; moreover, it is impossible for art to recuperate the death of the artist.

Freeland observes that in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe, "what can be experienced almost always can be expressed in words by the characters as well" (2011, p.79). He studies Barker's art of theatre with a specific reference to the playwright's *The Ecstatic Bible* (written 1993 - 1994) and premiered the Adelaide Festival in Australia, which consists of twenty nine scenes running to 332 pages. Freeland consequently offers a rhetorical reading of the play not through dismantling "the text by exposing some putative breakdown or lacuna in its signifying logic but rather to pursue the logic of the text's signification in order to see where language itself appears to break down or leave off" (*Ibid.*, p.81).

Freeland consequently employs rhetorical reading to bring to the fore "the tensions between referential and figurative instantiations of language demonstrating how, far from smoothly colluding in the creation of an autonomous aesthetic object, each undermines the other" (*Ibid.*, p.82). Freeland further studies Barker's language and the importance of being voiced in

order to make sense in his drama. Challenges for actors in performing non-punctuated texts of Barker become unique when it comes to staging Barker's works.

In "Poetry and intensification in Howard Barker's theatre of plethora" published in *Studies in Theatre and Performance* in 2012, Gritzner focuses on two of the most recent plays by Howard Barker, namely, *BLOK/EKO* (2011) and *Hurts Given and Received* (2010) by exploring "the trans-personal effects of the poetic theatrical gesture" (p.337) in Barker's work.

While the article revolves on the tragic aspect of Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe, it also introduces the comic response to the nature of the tragic which brings about transformation to a situation or existence which in turn entails an instinctual awareness. This article also provides informative insights into Barker's engagement with the language which is itself a significant aspect of this research.

Sinkwan Cheng (2010) studies the disagreement between the British government and the Irish Republic Army over the designation of the Irish Republic Army prisoners as either criminals or political prisoners as the quarrel is depicted in Howard Barker's 1979 play entitled *Credentials of a Sympathizer* [sic]. Through a stylistic reading of Barker's play in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's theories, Cheng establishes how the British negotiator in Barker's play makes use of symbolic as represented by upper-class manners, language and the manipulation of "the complex meanings and connotations attached to different cultural artefacts" (2010, p.270). This paper is interesting in that it studies power relations and aesthetisation of politics; however, unlike the current research it does not concern itself with overthrowing or subverting the dominant power and rather probes into how the dominant takes advantage of its cultural capitals to further exert domination over its subjects.

As a playwright and poet whose concern for arts has been paramount as shown in his prolificacy, Barker is interested in and under the influence of Theodor Adorno. In a paper

concerned with the inversions of the Fascist Aesthetic, Elizabeth Sakellaridou studies the plays written at the end of the twentieth century by Harold Pinter (*Ashes to Ashes*, 1996), Sara Kane (*Cleansed*, 1998) and Howard Barker (*Und*, 1999) in the light of Raul Friedländer's theories about the changing picture of Nazism. Sakellaridou (2003) argues that Friedländer prefers the approach to the Holocaust which features "the indeterminacy of memory and discourse" than validating historical accounts of the event (p.89).

In reading Howard Barker's *Und*, Sakellaridou observes that the play can be properly accommodated within the "Barthian trope of the betrayed, bereaved lover's discourse" like the two other plays by Pinter and Kane (*Ibid.*, p.96). Barker's character *Und* is caught in a state of PTSD while trapped "between the extremities of denial and acceptance of a real or imaginary experience of terminal atrocity"; in order to achieve a cure, she ritualises by the means of "compulsive repetition of her true or hypothetical shock experience" (*Ibid.*). She emphasises that the deconstructive tactics which Barker employs, both in text and in the stage language, features the same paradoxical process which Nietzsche and Adorno draw on; in other words, "creation through negative or nihilistic strategies of thought and perception" (*Ibid.*, p.103).

One of the challenges while doing a literature search on Howard Barker's theatre was finding academic voices seriously challenging the playwright and his theories. One such scholar, however, has been Liz Tomlin whose article entitled "The Politics of Catastrophe: Confrontation or Confirmation in Howard Barker's Theatre" (2000) raises concern over the above-mentioned issue and argues that the support that Howard Barker has received from his publisher as well as the actors who assisted with the establishment of The Wrestling School have contributed to the acceptance of Howard Barker's theories for theatre and their underlying premises "without critique as a starting point for any analysis of his work" (2000, p.66).

In other words, being rejected by the mainstream British theatre, Barker benefitted from receiving confirmations in the publishing as well as performing industries (not to mention the academia) without further challenges. While agreeing with this argument, I would like to also elucidate this point that having enjoyed such a privilege does not and should not lead to undermining Barker's theatre.

Tomlin describes the predominant ideology on which the moral and social values of Barker's audience are based (as also confirmed by the playwright himself) as "a liberal humanist social democracy" (2002, p.67). She further categorises Barker's characters into primary (protagonists) and secondary in terms of the ideology they pursue. In other words, Barker's primary characters propagate a neo-liberalist philosophy while his secondary characters "are firmly rooted in the politics of social democracy or liberal humanism" which Barker believes to be the dominant ideology of his audience (p.70). Constructed to be inferior to his protagonists, Barker's secondary characters draw on conventional naturalistic devices which are otherwise abandoned in the construction of the playwright's protagonists.

Consequently, Tomlin argues that through the creation of such a confrontation between his characters, Barker seeks to firstly provoke the audience's identification with the secondary characters and secondly to challenge them through an encounter with the protagonists' neo-liberalist discourse (p. 71). Mentioning that Barker's protagonists are designed to provoke the audience's emulation than empathy, Tomlin adds that it is necessary that the audience's "identification with the liberal-humanist or social democratic voice of the secondary character" be shattered. Through this argument, however, Tomlin intends to establish this point that instead of questioning the neo-liberalism of Barker's protagonists, secondary characters propagate it by the means of opposing the protagonists.

Tomlin's final argument in this article poses a serious challenge to how Barker perceives his audience. Admitting that a deep investigation into the party politics of Howard Barker's audience is required to be able to challenge and consequently refute Barker's assumptions about his audience, Tomlin highlights "the phenomenal rise of the New Right" in last two decades of the 20th century. Interestingly, she refers to the debates which consider Barker's protagonists' neo-liberalism "as a key component of the New Right" that dominates Britain's political scene (p.76).

In conclusion, Tomlin contends that not only is Barker not freeing his audience from ideological influences but also he is educating them in as ideology which reflects the ideology his audience is already steeped in (p.76). this article, none the less, impugns the tenets of Barker's 'art of theatre' which leaves room for more investigation into the subject as it is one very crucial one on which Barker's theatre theories hinge.

"Barker as a dramatic theorist" has been an issue of debate among critics and theatre scholars. For example, David Barnett studies the gap which exists with regard to the issue of Barker as a theorist and Barker as the playwright with reference to *Arguments for a Theatre*. Barnett starts his argument by establishing the fact that Barker is more Nietzschean in the standards he seeks to establish in his *Arguments for a Theatre* and more credit is required to be given to Nietzsche. He refers to Barker's constant reiteration of the significance of tragedy and his historicisation, which similar to that of Nietzsche, is "oblique, preferring to imply the dialectic rather than to state it" (2001, p.460).

In highlighting Barker's divergence from Nietzsche in his advocacy of tragedy, Barnett contends that "[r]ather than locating the genre between the two extremes of the Nietzschean tragic personality, Barker conceives of it as a weapon against a social system hell-bent on the eradication of pain and suffering" (*Ibid.*). Barnett further explains that Barker owes his

understanding of tragedy to Nietzsche's conception of tragic drama rooted in "the conflict of the Apolline and the Dionysiac" (*Ibid.*)

Consequently, one of the contradictory issues which regard to Barker's theatre is the discrepancy between his theatre's radical aesthetic and the means he employs to "enact his sociopolitical critique" (Barnett, 2001, p.463). Barnett argues that Barker treats the individual as hypostasised concept who "is capable of a forbidding yet achievable self-liberation" instead of problematising "the sovereign individual subject" (*Ibid.*). it is interesting, how the twentieth century drama has criticised the notion of "the sovereign individual"; Barker, however, has remained uncompromising ignoring the fact that through his insistence on the notion he is creating a form of ideology.

Barnett rightly criticises Barker through arguing that the playwright's failure to engage with the arguments on the contemporary notion of "the authentic" and his ahistorical approach toward the individual have made his drama rely on "a nineteenth century Nietzsche" without revisiting the philosopher's thoughts in the context of the twentieth century (2001, p.464). consequently, even though Barker necessitates "a tragedy of moral transgression, an unnatural language, a special site for the theatre, an imaginative art that does not look to the empirical world for validation, and he triumph of emotional experience overintellectual analysis", he should consider that they are not possible by drawing on old models without catering for the changes of the playwright's contemporary society (*Ibid.*).

As it will be discussed further in the literature review, Barker who emphasises on the vices of interpretation and relaying messages by works of art ironically keeps offering interpretations of his works in especially *Argument for a Theatre*. Barnett, further adds that as such, Barker's theory can become a prison of inflexible categories that fail to do justice to the artistic output it seeks to promote (*Ibid.*, p.464). Finally, Barnett describes Barker's drama as one which

"engenders an ambiguity that goes far beyond the limits of its authors more monolithic theoretical tracts" (*Ibid.*, p.473).

In his essay entitled "The Language of Theatre in Britain Today", Dunn (1994) describes Barker as a savage hero when it comes to attacking the "liberal notions of equality and right-wing notions of natural order" (p.34). Dunn argues that Barker's set of values, including his "illiberalism", reminded left-wing artistic directors of the Thatcherite Right. Therefore, they considered his plays as an attack "on the crass sentimentality that permeates the latest nostrum of the Left, sexual politics" (*Ibid.*, p.38).

Dunn believes that Barker's characters are endowed with the ability to separate themselves from the trap of turmoil with which they are engaged while keeping their "pace". He emphasises that Barker owes his achievement in the British theatre to his skilful use of language in the service of his cunningly-intricate plots which are informed with moral dilemmas (1994, p.34).

Presenting his input two years before Dunn, Allan Thomas observes Barker's extensive use of allegoric method and emphasises on its inclination towards modern allegory which "shows a tendency to present continuing situations of dilemma rather than the certainties of allegories of the medieval period and the Renaissance" (Thomas, 1992, p.435).

Thriving on its openness and concealment, allegory encourages the audience to engage in active interpretation (Thomas, 1992, p.435). Basing his plots on myths and legend, it might occur to the reader or the audience that he seeks to reach a common ground with them; however, he portrays these familiar stories "within highly unusual perspectives which create immediate puzzles of interpretation: actions which are set upon a ground of meaning become unstable" (*Ibid.*, pp.435-436). Furthermore, Barker projects myths forward in time in order to investigate them in the light of the future while intentionally cultivating anachronism (*Ibid.*).

Thomas argues that in the light of allegory, Barker's *The Europeans* has deliverance and delivery as its guiding words. A literal exploration of the concept depicts a child delivery on stage. Thomas adds:

[T]he allegory here is plain, a new concept of Europe has been born from attack, or rape, by the Turks. Later the child is handed over to the Turks by Starhemberg, the military saviour, or "deliverer" of Vienna. The allegory, now somewhat, murky, suggests that the violent Turkish fathering must be acknowledged. Starhemberg becomes deliverer in a double sense; he gives us, as well as saves. The contradictoriness of the action reveals Barker's insistent pressure on the ideas with the language of the original metaphor: words fracture into a multiplicity of meanings (p.437).

By means of allegory, Barker gives concrete dramatic form to his ideas and conceptions he seeks to portray. However, he does not offer resolutions for the obscurity and uncertainties which his plays feature (Thomas, 1992, p.440). It remains unresolved if allegory has been a suitable mode for a playwright who is outspokenly against didacticism or delivering messages in theatre in the twentieth century. The foregoing notwithstanding, "Barker creates his dark trials and shadowed renewals in a complex response to events in Britain and Continental Europe which have forced the re-examination of political visions" (*Ibid.*, p.442).

The last essay in the first category of essays which I introduced earlier is Robert Shaughnessy's "Howard Barker, The Wrestling School and the Cult of Author" (1989). The essay is rather dated; however, it is significant in the sense that it offers an insight into shaping Barker's reputation not only as a playwright but also as a poet and writer. The very fact that Barker has enjoyed the luxury of having a theatre company exclusive to the performance of his plays is indicative of ignorance and rejection of his work by the mainstream British theatrical institutions (Shaughnessy, 1989, pp.263-264).

Shaughnessy further studies the publication of Barker's scripts by John Calder and how the cover of his play scripts went through an evolution through the course of time, projecting

Barker's image as a writer. He further refers to the criticism written on Barker's plays, making the salient observation that apart from the essays and the interview published on Howard Barker, in Howard Barker Special Issue of *Gambit* by John Calder, no other remarkable literature has been written on Barker's theatre.

Shaughnessy's contention is that Howard Barker himself has been actively offering interpretation and criticism of his own work. He has positioned himself at the centre of everything related to his work while Shaughnessy calls for the Barthesian death of the author in Barker's case. One point which Shaughnessy rightfully makes vis-à-vis Barker's propositions as published in his 'Fortynine Asides for a Tragic Theatre' is that "they are absolutely characteristic in their deliberate, provocative avoidance of rational, structural argument" (1989, p.269). Finally, Shaughnessy suggests that "the genuinely radical potential that is present is present in Howard Barker's work actually needs the obliteration of 'Howard Barker' as a controlling, mediating, and ultimately explanatory presence in order for it to be fully realized [*sic*]" (*Ibid.*, p.270).

In other words, if one is to take Barker's interpretation of his oeuvre for granted, all the criticism levelled at his plays will incline toward one single direction. Notwithstanding the playwright's like or dislike of it, his plays render themselves easily to reading which in most cases are contradictory to Barker's intentions as he claims. Finally, I would agree with Shaughnessy in that Barker must cease controlling his theatre and its reception by the readers and audience.

As it can be seen above, critics have engaged very closely with the theatre of Howard Barker, their work spanning almost three decades (1989 to 2018). Although they do not advance a convergent view of Barker, their work certainly illuminates various aspects of his dramaturgy and some present the core points of discussion in this research.

Essays on Staging Barker's Plays

As mentioned earlier, the second category of essays I have grouped in this literature review are concerned with the staging of Barker's plays. In this section, I look at five most recent essays on the performance of Barker's plays. The most recent essay entitled "What Is this Place...?" – Howard Barker's Spatial Scenography" (2018) by Lara Maleen Kipp establishes the scantiness of research carried out on Barker's scenographic engagement with his works and offers a study of Barker's spatial scenography by analysing Barker's drama from the late 1990 s to mid-2000s. By applying Lyotard and Johnson's concept of postmodern sublime, Kipp highlights main principals of Barker's spatial scenography. Kipp argues that Barker's stage spaces feature "imaginative limitlessness and the conceptual upheaval of boundaries coexist with the necessarily limited, and physically defined stage space, and the dramatic locales that arise within it" (2018, p.250).

Kipp clarifies that in her essay, place is "part of space and shares its temporal three-dimensionality" (*Ibid.*, p.251). She analyses Barker's *Und* (2012), *A House of Correction* (2010) and *Found in the Ground* (2008). With regard to *Und*'s production, she argues how the descent of a mirror in the beginning of the play introduces upon the stability of an aristocratic woman's parlour and further disrupts the notion of a fourth wall by reflecting the woman's face to the audience (Kipp, 2018, pp.251-252). Kipp believes that "Barker's spatial scenography denies spectators immediate and concrete comprehension, instead inviting a process of interrogation and repeated re-inscription" (*Ibid.*, p.253). It is worth mentioning that the use of mirror both as stage prop and referred to in dialogues between characters, is popular in Barker's oeuvre and will be discussed later in the thesis with reference to (*Uncle Vanya*, *The Castle* and *The Power of the Dog*).

In reading *A House of Correction*, Kipp clarifies how Barker creates "certain spatial premises, only to dismantle them over time" (2018, p.254). Unlike in *Und*, in *A House of Correction* the dismantling of the spatial premises takes place at opening of the play by a cascading leaflet storm (*Ibid.*). The play's spatial scenography includes "a warfront, with the inhabitants of a strange, labyrinthine estate that are subjected to repeated leaflet bombings by passing planes" (*Ibid.*, p.255). She further explains that:

In refusing conclusive meaning, and instead forcing audiences to repeatedly attempt to make sense of the overwhelming strangeness of the places presented on stage, in particular those aspects that are invisible and/or imaginary, Barker offers a sequence of potentially sublime objects (endless courtyards, bottomless wells, porous walls) for the individual spectator to contend with. At the same time, their near-familiarity invites spectators to engage with the spatial premises on a moment-by-moment basis, drawing on individual personal recognition, even if the resulting meanings remain fragmented and fluid (Kipp, 2018, p.255).

Barker employs the same technique in plays such as (*Uncle*) *Vanya* with the appearance of the sea, and *The Castle* with the construction of the castle and its grandeur which even goes beyond the imagination of those who are involved with its construction. Therefore, as Kipp explains initially spectators engage with the spatial premises; even though, they consequently fail to establish integrated meanings.

By establishing an excess of sound and imagery in the exordium of *Found in the Ground*, Barker presents "several timelines and planes of reality that chart the burning of a former Nuremberg judge's library at his behest, to simplify in the extreme" (Kipp, 2018, p.258). The exordium then multiplies "to the to the soundtrack of an unceasing industrial process, a naked, headless woman perambulates through an unidentifiable landscape" (*Ibid.*, pp.257-258). The multi-layered imagery of the scenography further involves headless, high-heeled,

graceful Macedonia. Kipp finally argues that Barker's spatial scenography in *Found in the Ground* creates a sense of limbo, leaving the spectator with fragmented bits of meaning. Kipp concludes that Barker's exordia shatters the conventional perception of the stage space at the very beginning of the play and rather brings "an experiential and largely image-based mode of theatre spectatorship" to the fore (*Ibid.*, p.261).

Apart from being meticulous about the scenography of the staging of his plays, Barker also asserts control over how his plays should sound. Curtin in a 2014 essay entitled "The art music of theatre: Howard Barker as sound designer" argues that Barker takes music that is abstract and might not be necessarily recognisable as music per se, further isolates it and uses it as a part of a "sonic matrix"; he further adds that "Barker and his collaborators (real and fictional) fashion an 'art music' of theatre in which sound is privileged for its referential ambiguity and polyvalence, and, indeed, its potential strangeness as a signifying agent" (2018, p. 271). Curtin believes that as a sound designer, Barker goes beyond Barker's use of pre-recorded sound and encompasses his use of language and its directorial arrangement (*Ibid.*). Barker's sound designs seek to make his catastrophic theatre audibly apparent (*Ibid.*, p.273). The final argument in the article is that Barker might implement a perfect task of designing the sound for the production of his plays; he, however, cannot control the way the music he chooses are received by the audience and how they are affected by it. In discussing Barker's auteurship, the above-mentioned point is highly significant as more scholars are confirming how controlling Barker has been over his plays especially vis-à-vis their staging (*Ibid.*, p.281).

In his essay, "Crowd or chorus? Howard Barker's mise-en-scène and the tradition of the chorus in the European theatre of the twentieth century", Jens Peters (2012) looks at Barker's use of language and body at the service of his exploration of plethora in his play BLOK/EKO from the perspective of European experiments with new choric forms (p.305). Peters

demonstrates how “how the plethora of language and the plethora of crowds combine most powerfully in the concepts of chorus and musicalization [*sic*]” (*Ibid.*, p.306). He argues that Barker explores the ancient notion of chorus to establish a connection with musicality which is one of the main features of the BLOK/EKO. Peters who is familiar with the tradition of German theatre mentions that the use of chorus has become popular in the twentieth century (*Ibid.*, p.307). Interestingly, Barker rejects the use of the term chorus in relation to the above-mentioned play, which I believe is typical of Barker, instead the playwright refers to the crowds in his play as simply a group of actors.

The function of the chorus does not need to be complicated then. The mere fact that it brings plenty of bodies on the stage incarnates plethora (Peters, 2012, p.311). Peters describes Barker’s “spatial use of the chorus ... [as] more naturalistic, but equally deliberate with regard to its intended effect” and thus highlights a point which is in contradiction with Barker’s opinion of his work and its performance.

Karoline Gritzner reiterates Barker’s non-discursive and non-reconciliatory mode of communication in his Theatre of Catastrophe and further describes it as a theatre of desire and non-knowledge (2012, p.338). Gritzner reads Barker’s tragic theatre against the tragic poems of the German Romantic poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843) who found the expression of intimacy and intensity in the form of tragedy (*Ibid.*, 339). Gritzner argues that in Barker’s theatre, especially in his play *BLOK/EKO*, excess is incarnated through intensity and depth:

The stage is crowded with a chorus of doctors, nurses and medical students; Eko’s song is so intense that it is inaudible and thus relies on (albeit questionable) interpretations by her servants; the poet Pindar is celebrated and heaped with prizes as much as the struggling poet Tot is rejected, deprived of

recognition and pushed into a life of criminality, which drives him deeper into cynicism, despair and towards death (Gritzner, 2012, pp.342-343).

In terms of staging Barker's plays, Gritzner explains that theatre of plethora ignores a lot of dramaturgical conventions. It features interruption and confusions and offers theatrical gestures which are not sociological (*Ibid.*, p.344). Barker's use of chorus and mode of plethoric theatre was also discussed in Jens Peters' essay which was discussed earlier. Gritzner's essay, nonetheless, studied the staging and dramaturgy of the same play from another angle.

This section finally concludes with a review of David Ian Rabey's essay "Chasing the ellipses: Staging Howard Barker's *The Forty (Few Words)*". In this piece, David Ian Rabey shares his experience of directing the first performance of a play by Barker, *The Forty*, which consists of forty short plays some of which are "either wordless or involving the repetition or refinement of a single spoken phrase" (Rabey, 2012, p.286). As long as the texts of the plays do not carry much weight, the gaze and the look gain prominence which, on the other hand, puts the burden of the plays on the shoulder of the actors compared to other Barker plays (*Ibid.*, p.298).

Rabey concludes that the performance of *The Forty* is demanding from several aspects. He mentions that choreography is mandatory, the plays are evocatively musical and; therefore, "particular and specific effects of emotional depth be achieved and refined through precisely renewed efforts of physical and sonic precision" (2012, p.301). There are many aspects to be considered in the performance of Barker's plays as the playwright demands that the play engages audience members comprehensively; thus, one can imagine the challenges which such an enterprise might face.

This section of the literature review has shed light on these challenges to not only establish the originality of this research but to also open another window into Barker's world.

Essays on Barker in the Larger Context of the British Theatre

The third category of essays offers a study of Barker's works in the larger context of the contemporary British drama. Even though Barker's theatre was introduced in the context of the British theatre and history earlier, this section seeks to further investigate the most relevant essays which looked at the subject of Barker's theatre between 2008 and 1992.

An essay by Karoline Gritzner published in 2008 is entitled "(Post)Modern Subjectivity and the New Expressionism: Howard Barker, Sarah Kane, and Forced Entertainment". This article is another reflection on Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe in the context of Adorno's philosophy related to the post-Auschwitz culture in which he discusses the fading possibilities for subjective experience in the post-modern society. Gritzner employs Adorno's thoughts on the post-Auschwitz culture's materialisation of the self and the possible resistance to the process through an encounter with either the aesthetic or "the distinctively theatrical" (2008, p.328).

Gritzner studies the above-mentioned philosophical argument in relation to Sara Kane and Howard Barker's theatre. She refers to and relies on Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe and its reformulation of tragedy as a genre wherein individuality is thoroughly explored. Explaining that Barker seeks to find the genuine individual experience in the tragic territory, Gritzner asserts that Barker considers the enigma of tragedy as "a counterforce against the dominant liberal-humanist ideology of mass culture" (2008, p.332). The argument of the current research initiates a counterpoint discussion against the strength of tragedy in the

creation of an authentic individual experience by highlighting the significance of grotesque carnival moments in shaping a sense of individuality for the audience.

In her article entitled "Aporia or Euphoria: British Political Theatre at the Dawn of the 1990s" (1992), Sakellarido studies the situation of the British political theatre at the beginning of the 90s and explains that the fall of the Eastern Europe socialism worsened the problems the British theatre was already facing. Sakellaridou considers the following as the main challenges of the British political theatre:

The split between the political and the artistic avant-garde, the assimilation of the fringe and alternative theatres by the mainstream, the failure to create a new theatre audience of the left and the emergence of a new mentality of individualism and classless opportunism in Thatcherite Britain leftist dilemma ... (1992, p.52).

He further argues that such circumstances made Barker come up with his theory for theatre as the populist theatre which stemmed from culture industry was condemnable to him. One of the crucial characteristics of Barker's theatre as described by Sakellaridou is Barker's rejection of any responsibility to the state, the critic and the audience (1992, p.55).

1.3.2.3. PhD Theses

In a PhD thesis entitled *Sacred Tragedy: An Exploration into the Spiritual Dimension of the Theatre of Howard Barker* (2014), Groves studies Barker's theatre and religion by focusing on two major influences, namely the medieval Christian mystical theologian Meister Eckhart and the ancient Greek tragedy element. The sacredness Barker attaches to tragedy serves as the baseline for this thesis in which Groves draws analogies between Greek tragedy, as a

religious and ritual event, and Barker's theories of tragedy as a sacred art. Death serves as the common point in both Greek tragedy and Barker's tragedy.

Groves argues that Barker's immigration from socialist satirical theatre towards tragedy was informed by an increasing interest in religious and spiritual subject matter. He contends that Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe puts forward "a radical excavation of moments in Europe's spiritual heritage and the deconstruction of monotheistic ideas and narratives inform the tragic and atheistic spirituality that Barker offers in its place" (2014, p.12). The thesis provides a detailed insight to the religious and spiritual aspects of Howard Barker's thought and theatre emphasising and highlighting the role of tragedy.

In *Utopia and Politics in the Theatre of Howard Barker* (1998), Erik Paul Weissengruber undertakes an interesting exploration of the concept of utopia in Barker's theatre through the thoughts by philosopher Ernst Bloch, semiotician Louis Marin and, sociologist Karl Mannheim. Weissengruber studies the utopianism of Barker's hope for and effort towards transvaluation of the British society. Analysing Barker's opinions, Weissengruber concludes that Barker has succeeded in "inverting the apocalyptic Marxist optimism into pessimistic cultural despair, and depicts the present as a wasteland, without the possibility of a transformed future" (1988, p.iii).

It is argued in the research that Barker abandons social utopias in favour of creating temporary utopias on stage. In the theatrical utopia, a person is liberated from the forces of moral and social restrictions to which he or she is exposed in the real world and; therefore; can bask in the aberration of a large-scale freedom. This is an ephemeral concrete type of utopia which Barker advocates in the absence of the hope for the creation of a real one.

Like the current research, in this thesis Weissengruber discusses the significance of a concrete experience for Barker as opposed to the un-promised hopes for the future. In this

sense, utopia, like carnival, shares the prospects for a new and guaranteed experience for both the actors and the audience. The spectators, especially, are free to decide later if they would like to take any actions which can be conducive to real changes in the social and cultural aspects of their lives.

Amanda Price, in her PhD thesis entitled *The Theatre of Promiscuity: A Comparative Study of the Dramatic Writings of Wole Soyinka and Howard Barker* (1995), offers a comparative study of Howard Barker and Wole Soyinka in the light of the concept of the 'artist'. She parallels the above-mentioned playwrights' journeys from the angle of "promiscuous" self-definition as a crucial means through which the artistic imagination is used to relate to the social and cultural context in which works of arts will be received. Author's relationship to the text, creation of characters and the spectators' relation with and reception of the work are highly emphasised in this research which draws on Nietzschean philosophy to further its arguments.

Price argues that Barker and Soyinka are two artists who speak to their nations instead of speaking for them. Price concludes that for both Barker and Soyinka, the transformation of the actor on the stage is of utmost importance. This PhD research has drawn on the artistic thoughts and developments of the two playwrights and their thriving despite the socio-cultural odds against which they were working.

Finally, the depth and plethora of research conducted on Howard Barker's theatre cannot be summarised in a chapter in this research. However, the most significant ones were covered in this section on the existing literature on Barker's dramatic work. The review of literature proved that none of the previous researches on Barker had attended to the issue this research is undertaking to study. Moreover, it showed that the current research goes against the grain

of the body of the scholarship on Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe and opens a new window to the body of the research on the playwright and his theories.

1.4. Summary

Earlier in this chapter the aims and motivation behind this research were explained. It was also mentioned that Barker's repudiation of Anton Chekhov's cult of comedy as depicted in the passivity and stalemate of plays such as *Uncle Vanya* and the British society's attention to Chekhov's works laid the foundation for this research to examine a completely new aspect in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. The section on literature review provided a background on Chekhov's reception in the British society and the problems Barker identified around the many productions of the Russian playwright's pieces in Britain which finally led him to re-work *Uncle Vanya*.

Having established the grounds on which Barker walked to dispute Chekhov, a review of the relevant literature on Barker's theories and plays was presented in order to depict him in the bigger picture of the academic and critical research. A review of Barker's reception in the British society or lack thereof as well as the theories applied to the study of his oeuvre offered evidence on the fact that this current research is responding to a research gap in this field with its unprecedented choice of subject and theory to study the Barkerian opus. Moreover, through the definition of the key terms which are to be drawn on in the course of the research, this chapter set to provide a research framework for the content to appear in the next chapters.

Chapter Two following hereafter, lays the theoretical foundation for the research at hand by introducing Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of carnival which will be then applied to the selected plays by Barker in the chapter to follow.

CHAPTER TWO

2. The Carnival in Theatre

In the previous chapter, we saw that Howard Barker's theories of the Theatre of Catastrophe and tragedy are so seriously taken for granted that the comic aspect as well as the role of laughter and the grotesque in his works is neglected. It seems that the study of laughter does not concern the serious problems of Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. In order to establish the cruciality of the carnival in the post-war British culture, this introduction contextualises the genre in the mentioned era.

As discussed in Chapter One, the political changes in Britain in the eighties left an undeniably huge impact on the cultural sphere of the society as well. Michael Billington believes that during Thatcher's tenure as the British Prime Minister, the British society observed "a shift away from public subsidy to corporate sponsorship, a transformation of the Arts Council from an independent agency to an instruments of the government and growth of a siege mentality in arts organisations" (2013). Under such circumstances, musical as "the most potentially profitable of all theatrical forms and the ultimate celebrant of individualism" (Billington, 2007, p.284) won the favour of the Thatcherite government to the extent that it embodied "Thatcherism in action" (*Ibid.*). Musical, therefore, turned into the dominant form of the eighties (*Ibid*, p.285) thanks to intensive marketing.

Musical was a form capable of offering its spectators "both escape from reality and spiritual uplift" (Billington, 2007, p.286); thus, spectators sought to gain consolation from theatre "in a time of increasing despair" (*Ibid.* p.301). Moreover, Billington argues that towards the end of

the eighties, the public felt that they need something beyond apolitical escapism and fortunately theatre gained back its force to practice its traditional role of seeking dissent vis-à-vis the dominant forms of eighties which were the musical and the epic (*Ibid.*, pp.286-287).

Under such circumstances, the leftist playwrights who were keen to establish a new theatrical form came to the scene. One of these forms which was advocated by David Edgar was the carnival in response to the individualism which was promoted by Thatcher's government. Peacock, nonetheless, argues that Edgar was not alone as a left-wing playwright to believe that the carnivalesque was the answer (1999, p.113). The Carnivalesque refers to both the narrow concept of "the specific festivals and feast days celebrated over the course of the year" as well as "the whole range of popular, festive practices that developed during the Middle Ages" (Barker, 1984, p.217). Carnivalesque is a brief celebration of breaking free from the dominant truth and the ruling power.

Carnival literally means "goodbye to the flesh" and originally refers "to the festivities on the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday, the last expression of *joie de vivre* before the fasting period of Lent" (Berger, 2014, p.77). The significance of probing into the origins of the carnival for this research is that it elucidates how carnival wildly celebrates all the joys of the flesh in the shadow of death (*Ibid.*); a theme which frequently appears in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. Carnival, consequently, is a different social construction of the comic which, although restricted in time, is "spatially unbounded, with relatively loose forms of behavior and speech, and with no dividing barrier between performers and audience" [*sic*] (*Ibid.*, p.76).

Before taking this part of the argument further, I will explore the theory of carnival. Premised on views pronounced by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), this framework of theory is particularly useful in supporting the argument of the research that laughter and humour are vital to Barker's tragic theatre.

2.1. Mikhail Bakhtin's Theory of Carnival

Bakhtin outlines his theory of carnival in *Rabelais and His World* (1984) where he puts great emphasis on the cultural and social aspects of Rabelais' work as well as on the literary aspect. The significance of Bakhtin's study, however, encompasses his powerful account of the transition of the Continent's culture into modernity (Denith, 1995, p.64). From the Middle Ages onwards, the historical institution of carnival and the popular festivities it entailed bore evidence to important aspects of Europe's cultural, personal and social history (*Ibid.*, p.64). Renaissance marked the peak of the carnival attitude which was characterised by "the flowering of a gay, affirmative, and militantly anti-authoritarian [approach] to life, founded upon a joyful acceptance of the materiality of the body" (*Ibid.*, p.64). The carnival spirit, however, gradually declined from the seventeenth century onwards under the influences of modernity and rationalism (*Ibid.*).

The aesthetic articulated in Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* revolves around the celebration of "the anarchic, body-based and grotesque elements of popular culture, and seeks to mobilise them against the humourless seriousness of official culture" (Denith, 1995, p.64).

Bakhtin studies "historical transitions in the significance of laughter, and [...] the relationship between official and unofficial culture (Taylor, 1995, p.12) which he categorises in four stages. The first stage is the stage of "preclass and prepolitical society" where the comic and the serious were valorised equally and were considered official. The advent of the class-structured societies entailed a consolidation of the positions of the Church and the feudal class by the means of creating a sense of awe and fear around themselves. The second stage

featured "a separation between serious and comic discourses, between the official and unofficial folk culture". Barker "locates the practices of carnival" within this second stage (*Ibid.*).

The third stage or the Renaissance marks the rise of the bourgeoisie as a new ruling class and the collapse of feudal and Church authority (Taylor, 1995, p.13). Bakhtin argues that for this new ruling class to take over power a new form of discourse is required to pose challenges at the orthodoxies of medieval ideology. He consequently admits that carnivalesque practices offered the opportunity by the means of constructing relativity. Contrary to the official culture, the unofficial culture celebrated "the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.11) through the carnivalesque imagery.

Grotesque body, which dominated the carnival imagery simultaneously, represented birth and death, feasting and defecation (Bakhtin, 1984, p.11). Consequently, in the course of the Renaissance, "comic discourse acquired a new epistemological status alongside serious discourse" (Taylor, 1995, p.14) examples of which are available in the work of "Rabelais, Boccaccio, Shakespeare and Cervantes" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.72).

The fourth stage in the transitions of laughter encompasses the years from the Renaissance to the twentieth century. The set of changes which laughter went through is rooted in the socio-cultural realm, which both the feudal and theocratic power and the bourgeoisie had established or sought to establish. The bourgeoisie confronted a formal and official cultural realm and had, therefore, no choice but to establish itself by re-creating its cultural form. Under such circumstances, Bakhtin argues that there was no place left for "the ambivalence of the grotesque" (1984, p.101 quoted in Taylor, 1995, p.14). In the course of his scholarly studies of Rabelais, Bakhtin discovered that such a reorganisation of cultural forms by the

bourgeoisie affected carnivalesque forms in the sense that they were relegated in lower positions on cultural hierarchy (Taylor, 1984, p.14).

It is important to note that the Rabelaisian oeuvre also went through this degradation to the extent that his work was forced out of the bounds of great literature at the end of the sixteenth century (Bakhtin, 1985, p.5 quoted in Taylor, 1995, p.15). Ever since, the ups and downs the relationship between serious and comic discourse experienced did not lead to re-gauging of humour's value which would in turn bring about changes to the serious-comic hierarchy (Taylor, 1995, p.15). Bakhtin finally contends that the grotesque tradition, which was specific to the marketplace, have parted ways with the academic literary tradition "and can no longer be brought back together" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.109 quoted in Taylor, 1995, p.15).

Therefore, Bakhtin employs the term carnivalesque to point to both the narrow concept of "the specific festivals and feast days celebrated over the course of the year" as well as "the whole range of popular, festive practices that developed during the Middle Ages" (1984, p.217). The wider sense of carnivalesque according to Bakhtin encompasses:

1. *Ritual spectacles*: carnival pageants, comic shows of the marketplace.
2. *Comic verbal compositions*: parodies both oral and written, in Latin and the vernacular.
3. *Various genres of billingsgate*: curses, oaths, popular blazons (1984, p.5).

Bakhtin describes carnival as a celebration, contrary to the official feast, of short-term liberation from the dominant truth and more importantly from "the established order". The

carnival, moreover, suspended "all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions" and was "the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal" (1984, p.10).

The conception of carnival as put forward by Bakhtin centres upon the antinomies of life and death "which subsumes death into the larger constant regenerative becoming made manifest in the seasons and human gestation" (1984, p.10). In the same spirit, "dialogism is the fecund impregnation of language, monologism a cadaver" (Knowles, 1998, p.4).

"Heterglossia" and "multiplicity of style" compromise inherent features of the carnival. Carnivalisation, Krystyna Pomorska argues is the condition for the ultimate structure of lie that is formed by behaviour and cognition (Bakhtin, 1984, p.x). Bakhtin's carnival theory owes its greatness to the fact that firstly it goes into the depth of the freedom and the audacity which are preliminaries to the establishment of carnival. Secondly, his theory depicts the cunning which is needed to maintain the carnival and thirdly carnival's delicacy and its readily destructible feature (*Ibid.*, pp.x-xi).

Terry Eagleton holds that "Carnival brings together dramatic disruption and street-wise wisdom, reconciling the exceptional and the everyday. The wisdom of the folk is resolutely anti-tragic, as against the world-view of their more large gestured, fate-ridden superiors" [*sic*] (2003, p.186).

Banishing carnivalesque practices from the official stratum did not cease them from appearing in the non-official realms of society. The ban put on the carnival elevated its importance in terms of its capability to present an imagery importance in terms of its capability to present an imagery, which could serve as an alternative to the official imagery by putting forward new and alternative social relations (Taylor, 1995, pp.19-20). Grotesque imagery, laughter and the marketplace are three aspects of carnivalesque practices (*Ibid.*, p.20) which will be introduced below.

2.1.1. Grotesque Imagery

Grotesque realism is a conception, used by Bakhtin to refer to aspects of Rabelais' writing, which emphasise "the material and the bodily". Grotesque realism celebrates "the body which eats, digests, copulates, and defecates, but who does so in a wild, exaggerated and grotesque way" (Denith, 1995, p.65). Contrary to classical body, the grotesque body represents becoming rather than completion.

Grotesque imagery is one of the most crucial aspects of Bakhtin's theory of carnival. Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque portrays the body as unlimited, in constant transformation and as floating in time while linked to its past and present (Denith, 1995, p.77). The process of existence, therefore, remains an on-going one with being always changing and evolving (*Ibid.*).

Unlike the classic understanding of the body as complete, the grotesque body is best defined as an incomplete entity making the grotesque imagery "preoccupied with body's orifices, those points at which an individual body begins to merge with the world around it". Consequently, "mouths, noses, buttocks and genitals frequent the imagery of carnival". Furthermore, "the physical functions that mediate the relationship between the body and the world: eating, drinking, digestion, defecation, copulation, childbirth and death" are included in the grotesque imagery (Taylor, 1995, p.20).

Grotesque imagery contributes to shape reality by firstly, offering an alternative to "the spiritual imagery of the Church". Secondly, "the dynamism of the grotesque body represented an alternative to the stasis of the official order" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.21 and p.317). Finally,

grotesque imagery presents an alternative to the fear imposed on the society through the official imagery. Bakhtin argued that fear of potential catastrophes such as famine, drought, floods and disease overshadowed people's lives during the Middle Ages thanks to the official imageries' depiction of these threats. Grotesque imagery nonetheless broke the stranglehold of such fears by promoting an assimilation of humans with "cosmic elements" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.335 quoted in Taylor, 1995, p.21).

Bakhtin describes carnival as a celebration, contrary to the official feast, of short-term liberation from the dominant truth and more importantly from "the established order". The carnival, moreover, suspended "all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions" and was "the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal" (1984, p.10). Grotesque imagery, therefore, served the anti-hegemonic purposes as well by challenging the official reality, which was established under the fear of catastrophes. The grotesque bodies which are depicted in literature and arts, nonetheless, serve as eye-openers to conflicting possibilities which might otherwise remain neglected.

For Bakhtin who had lived the monologism prevalent in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics under Stalin, heteroglossia or the "historical dynamics of connotation" heralded a utopian freedom. Carnival, consequently, opposed all that was Stalinist:

[T]he dialogical voice of unofficial culture I the people resisted the theological monologism of the Catholic Church (and tyrannical communism); the grotesque body was celebrated, not condemned as sinful (or sanitized by canons of Soviet realism) [*sic*]; collective laughter in broad daylight defeats eschatological terror (and laughter as sinful in Russia); vitalist primitivism replaces the ascetic and life-denying culture of celibate prelacy. The utopian freedom of permanent becoming transcends the prison house of dogmas and Gulag of dissent (Knowles, 1998, p.4).

The bodily element in the grotesque realism is, therefore, "deeply positive". It is not, however, the physiological body as it is not individualised (Bakhtin, 1984, p.19). Degradation, which according to Bakhtin, is a crucial principle of grotesque realism entails "lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.19). Hence, "[l]aughter degrades and materializes [*sic*]" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.20). Henri Bergson argues that when the attention, which was meant for the spiritual, is directed to the material the comic is born.

Degradation has two aspects one is to come down from heaven to earth, which in this sense means to "bury, to sow, to kill simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better". The other aspect of degradation relates to "the lower stratum of the body" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.21). Therefore, the concept has both a negative and destructive aspect as well as a regenerating one (*Ibid.*, p.20).

Once the grotesque became a literary genre it went through transformations and carnival-grotesque images were employed in various ways. During the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries the carnival-grotesque elements were used in *commedia dell'arte*, in Moliere's comedies, in the seventeenth century's comic novel and travesty, in the tales of Voltaire and Diderot and in the works of Swift (Bakhtin, 1984, p.34).

Regardless of the writing in which the carnival-grotesque form is used, its function includes consecration of inventive freedom, permitting the combination of a variety of different elements and rapprochement thereof, liberation "from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.34). Moreover, Bakhtin highlights "the principle of humour in the grotesque and traces the origin of laughter to the human soul's need of joy and gaiety" (*Ibid.*, p.35).

Bakhtin argues that the Romantic grotesque served as a reaction against "the cold rationalism, against official, formalistic and logical authoritarianism; it was a rejection of that which is finished and completed, of the didactic and utilitarian spirit of the Enlightener's with their narrow and artificial optimism" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.37). The Romantic genre, however, became an "individual carnival, marked by a vivid sense of isolation. The carnival spirit was transposed into a subjective, idealistic philosophy. It ceased to be the concrete (one might say bodily) experience of the one, inexhaustible being, as it was in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance" (*Ibid.*).

The most crucial change which occurred to the Romantic grotesque was that although the principle of laughter was preserved, it transformed into a "cold humour, irony, sarcasm"; hence, no longer "joyful and triumphant hilarity" (Bakhtin, 1984, 38). Carnival laughter's "positive regenerating power" was downgraded to a minimum.

Pivotal to this research's theory is Bakhtin's argument regarding the transformation of the principle of laughter that permeates the grotesque. Terror and portrayal of a terrifying world, is one of a series of differences (Bakhtin, 1984, p.38). Other differences include madness, mask, marionette, devil, ambivalence and being nocturnal. These components acquire different attributes and functions in Romantic grotesque compared to the folk culture (*Ibid.*, pp.39-41). While they associate themselves with the comic, joyful and gay in the folk culture, in the Romantic grotesque they associate themselves with the negative and the dark. Terror permeates in the Romantic grotesque in the sense that all aspects of the everyday life turn senseless and hostile. "Something frightening is revealed in that which was habitual and secure" (*Ibid.*, p.39).

Madness is another indispensable grotesque theme, which depicts "somber, tragic aspect of individual isolation"[sic] (Bakhtin, 1984, p.39). Madness accounts for the individual's

different look at the world. The essence of grotesque encapsulates the depiction of an opposing and two-faced wholeness of life through the inseparable phases of negation and affirmation, of destruction (death) and birth of a new and better thing. Consequently, the corporeal lower stratum of the grotesque image including food, wine, the genital force and the organs of the body, harbours an affirmative triumphant hallmark because it ultimately leads to abundance (*Ibid.*, p.62). The realm of the grotesque is therefore a realm of the concrete and not the abstract. Bakhtin contends that:

The abstract idea distorts this nature of the grotesque image. It transforms the center of gravity to a "moral" meaning. Moreover, it submits the substratum of the image to the negative element. Exaggeration becomes a caricature. The beginning of this process is found in early Protestant satire, and later in the previously mentioned "Menippus Satire." But here disintegration is still at its early stage. The grotesque images selected to serve an abstract idea are still too powerful; they preserve their nature and pursue their own logic, independently from the author's intentions, and sometimes contrary to them [*sic*] (1984, pp.62-63).

Consequently, as expounded by Bakhtin, grotesque images can be intense and powerful to the extent that, like living entities, they carry on a life of their own. They develop a logic unique to them which can even contradict the intention of the author; this is one of the significant concepts that this research relies on to study comedy in Barker's plays. In other words, his images have not remained what Barker had envisaged them to be.

The carnival gains its potential from its reliance on fertility and rejuvenation, which inescapably follows death and "allows man to conquer the natural world around him" (Hall, 2011, p. 72). As an important aspect of the carnival theory, grotesque realism is defined by Bakhtin as the lowering of all that the official culture considers as "high, spiritual, ideal, abstract" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.19). "The carnivalesque challenges the official status quo in such

a way as to suggest changes within the official structure of society” (Hall, 2011, p.73). Pilný (2016) contends that it is important to understand and read Bakhtin's argument regarding the grotesque's subversive as an oblique strategy to pose a challenge to the ruling Soviet Communist Party which had survived for three decades when he started writing (p.7).

Grotesque can reveal the cultural, social and political aspects, which the official culture aims to suppress. People's consciousness did not allow carnival to be confined to the grotesque realism of Rabelais. It rather developed in terms of its own cults of degradation and debasement from the socio-historical point of view (Singh and Ringo, 2017, p.40). This fact must be accentuated that carnival, in general, depicts people's desire to "overthrow the rigidity and normativity of the old world" in order to rejuvenate a "humanized"[sic] world in which seriousness and laughter are intertwined (*Ibid.*).

2.1.2. Laughter

Closely related to grotesque imagery is the second aspect of carnival, which is laughter. However, before discussing Bakhtin's thoughts of laughter it is worth tracing his thoughts to the theory of laughter by Henri Bergson. Bergson is believed to have formatively influenced Bakhtin's thoughts (Rudova, 1996, p.175). For one thing, Bergson and Bakhtin were both against determinism and conventions. Mikhail Bakhtin is considered as "one of the most celebrated students of Bergson" (Rudova, 1996, p.17). Both Bergson and Bakhtin emphasised on becoming rather than being. They believed that persistent change embodies the essence of the world rather than ever-existing ideals and laws. The preserving process of becoming requires relinquishing "preconceived fixed concepts imposed by theorist systems" (Rudova, 1996, p.178).

2.1.2.1. Bergson's Theory of Laughter

Michael Billig describes *Laughter* by Bergson as pioneering the "first real social theory of laughter" (2005, p.111). Henri Bergson's contemplation on laughter was originally published as a series of three articles in the *Revue de Paris* on 1 and 15 February as well as 1 March, 1900 and later published in a book for the first time entitled *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* in the same year.

Encrusting mechanicality on the living (Bergson, 1911, p.37) shapes the nucleus of Henri Bergson's theory of humour. In this theory, laughter is a corrective measure, which has general improvement as its utilitarian aim (*Ibid.*, p.20). He, however, discusses that it is perceived in different aspects which is firstly the merging of the mechanical and living into each other verging towards an image of rigidity, secondly becoming rigid like a machine, and thirdly a man turning into a thing.

The approval of the existence of a logic of the "comic spirit" is pivotal to the Bergsonian theory of laughter; hence the significance of observations on the fields where the comic occurs. Firstly, laughter happens in a human environment or with regard to what is precisely human excluding sceneries and animals as well as objects unless they respectively suggest human qualities or are made by human hands. Secondly, there is no more powerful antagonist force against laughter than "emotion". In other words, laughter requires silencing human feelings or "a moment of anaesthesia of the heart". Thirdly, laughter is superlatively appreciated in the company of others and requires reverberations from others (Bergson, 1911, pp.3-5).

Bakhtin extracts three major characteristics out of the "complex nature" of the carnival laughter. Firstly, it is a festive and collective laughter. Secondly, it is universal and encompasses all. Thirdly, it is ambivalent, in other words, "it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives" (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.11-12).

The second characteristic though is the one, which differentiates between carnival laughter and modern satire. While carnival creates a world in which everybody is equal, the satirist stays outside the world of the objects of mockery and targets it with his negative laughter (Bakhtin, 1984, p.12). Bergson argues that despite its apparent spontaneity, "laughter always implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary" (Bergson, 1911, p.6).

Contextualisation of laughter in its natural environment and the establishment of its social function as well as its significance are essential to comprehend it. In consideration of the above, one can conclude that Bergson lays down two important principles for his theory of laughter and the definition of the comic: human and social aspects. The birth of laughter necessitates concentration of a group of men on one single individual, suppressing emotions and provoking intelligence (Bergson, 1911, pp.7-8).

As human beings living in a society, we should maintain levels of the complementary sources of tension and elasticity of mind and body to be able to attend to current circumstances and to adapt to them. By failing to demonstrate character-related, bodily as well as mental elasticity, we only fuel society's suspicion against ourselves for the reason that inelasticity heralds deviations from "the common centre round which society gravitates" (Bergson, 1911, p.19). The society will consequently react with a gesture excellently embodied in laughter. General improvement is the utilitarian aim of laughter (*Ibid.*, p.20).

Mechanicality together with repetition and similarity creates a comic effect. In other words, when there are similar characters on stage, for example, a group of them who act and gesture alike, the idea of mechanicality projects itself to our minds. As a result, we watch marionettes being worked on stage (Bergson, 1911, p.35).

However, as far as theatrical performances are concerned, the source of the comic lies in the comic devices the playwrights present to us, e.g. "periodical repetitions of a word or scene, the systematic inversion of the parts, the geometrical development of a farcical understanding" and other stage apparatuses, we should not, however, underestimate the power of the spectators' analysis in the course of the play (Bergson, 1911, p.36). The spectator must embark on the journey of perception and analysis refraining from judging the work of art unjustifiably.

Defamiliarisation gives birth to the comic. Bergson believes that being "comic de jure" without being "comic de facto" leads to false or weak laughter theories as "the continuity of custom" deadens "the comic quality" (Bergson, 1911, p.39). It is also partially the task of the spectator to defamiliarise what he is watching. Here Bergson elaborates on how the "logic of the imagination" operates differently compared to "the logic of the reason" (*Ibid.*, p.41). This is, therefore, how the spectators' analysis must engage itself in the perception of the comic.

The idea of disguise is also central to Bergson's theory in the sense that disguise of not only man but also of society and even of nature are comic (Bergson, 1911, p.42). Social disguising e.g. social ceremonies serve as a rich ground for laying down the foundations of comedy. The relation of social ceremonies to society analogously compares to relation of clothing to the body. Therefore, the "ceremonial side of social life must ... include a latent comic element ... waiting for an opportunity to burst into view" (*Ibid.*, p.44).

The mental identification of social ceremonies with serious objects because of custom lends seriousness to social ceremonies. Once isolated and defamiliarised in imagination, ceremonies lose their seriousness though. A serious social ceremony robbed of its ceremonial element turns comic in consideration of form as its participants project the image of "puppet in motion". Therefore, any "form or formula is a ready-made frame into which the comic element may be fitted" (Bergson, 1911, p.45).

To distract the attention which is meant for the moral side to the physical creates a comic incident (Bergson, 1911, p.51). This also includes embarrassment because of one's body. Another example of such a distraction is simply sitting down "in the middle of a fine speech" (*Ibid.*). To explain it, in more general terms, the manner seeks to outdo the matter:

Is it not perchance this idea that comedy is trying to suggest to us when holding up a profession to ridicule? It makes the lawyer, the magistrate and the doctor speak as though health and justice were of little moment, -- the main point being that we should have lawyers, magistrates and doctors, and that all outward formalities pertaining to these professions should scrupulously be respected. And so we find the means substituted for the end, the manner for the matter; no longer is it the profession that is made for the public, but rather the public for the profession (Bergson, 1911, p.53).

Having introduced Bergson's theory of laughter, as a precedent to Bakhtin's thoughts on laughter, the idiom of the carnival laughter as the second aspect of Bakhtin's theory of carnival will be discussed in the following section of this chapter.

2.1.2.2. Bakhtin's Theory of Laughter

The most distinguished features of the carnival laughter include being egalitarian by ignoring power hierarchies, festive and universal (Berger, 2014, p.78). In order to figure out the origins of the carnival laughter which lead to such characteristics, it is imperative that the components of the carnival humour be reviewed as follows.

Bakhtin explains that the culture of folk carnival humour encompasses carnival feasts, "the comic rites and cults, the clowns and fools, giants, dwarfs, and jugglers" and parody (Bakhtin, 1984, p.4). Therefore, carnival does not specifically belong to the realm of art. It rather "belongs to the borderline between art and life" (*Ibid.*, p.7). Henri Bergson (1911) also believed that comedy belongs to a realm between art and life. Feasts always had "meaningful philosophical content". Feats needed to be sanctioned by "the highest aims of human existence" in other words by "the world of ideals"; hence no sanction, no festivity. A consideration of the historical development of feasts proves that they are triggered by crisis or turning points in nature, in society and people's lives. Bakhtin stresses that within the class and feudal political systems, carnival served as people's second life in the manner of utopian "community, freedom, equality, and abundance" (*Ibid.*, p.9).

One of the crucial arguments of Bakhtinian carnival theory is that in the present-day laughter is either treated as "purely negative" or as sheer "drollery deprived of philosophical content" while folk humour is basically ambivalent (Bakhtin, 1984, p.12). Bakhtin defies material bodily principle as "images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life" and introduces it as a heritage of the culture of folk humour and the aesthetic concept which is characteristic of this culture and which Bakhtin calls the grotesque realism (*Ibid.*, p.18).

Another argument by Bakhtin regarding the modernisation of laughter in literary analysis is also crucial to this thesis. Bakhtin argues that the above-mentioned modernisation leads to a

laughter that does not laugh (1984, p.45). Despite this, he believes that grotesque was powerfully revived in the 20th century.

Bakhtin believes that unlike the Renaissance stress on laughter's "positive, regenerating, creative meaning", later philosophers' theories of laughter including that of Bergson majorly exposed laughter's negative functions (1984, p.71). Drawing on laughter's negative effects, Barker attempts to shun away from humour and comedy in the later stages of his career. Regardless of how decisive he strives to be, his work entails comic elements and moments. For Barker, laughter is possible when the audience is unanimous in its understanding of the message and this is one of the issues Barker seeks to avoid at all costs.

In the feast of fools, Bakhtin believes that the "theme of bodily regeneration and renewal" triumphs over laughter's negative derisive element. The reason was that the "the lower bodily stratum which could not express itself in official cult and ideology" was laughing; in other words, "man's second nature" was laughing (1984, p.75).

Festive laughter is related to "time and to the change of seasons". The medieval feast, consequently, enjoyed the two-facedness of Janus with its official ecclesiastical face toward the past and marketplace people's face toward the future. The marketplace feast, therefore, "opposed the positive, timeless stability, the unchanging established order and ideology, and stressed the element of change and renewal" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.81). Marketplace is consequently the third aspect of carnivalesque practices.

Taylor argues that:

[...] while the laughter and grotesque imagery of carnival had the potential to cultivate a rebellious critique of the ruling ideology, it was only on the street that this potential could be fulfilled, for it was here that the people gained a sense of their own collectivity (1995, p.24).

Travesty and the reversal of hierarchal levels shaped the elements of the folk festival (Bakhtin, 1984, p.81). Three important traits of laughter include universalism, freedom and "its relation to the people's unofficial truth" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.90). Bakhtin believes that laughter overpowers fear, "for it knows no inhibitions, no limitations. Its idiom is never used by violence and authority" (*Ibid.*).

Bakhtin further argues that "besides being the social consciousness of all the people", the medieval folk laughter serves a subversive function. Man consciously becomes a member of an increasingly new society through engagements with people from different lifestyles in the festive marketplace, in the carnival crowd, etc. Within the carnival laughter, therefor, an element of victory is embedded which features a defeat of not only supernatural awe, over death but also over the power. In its triumph over fear, which was provoked by power and mystery of the world, laughter was able to reveal the truth about both the power and the mystery (Bakhtin, 1984, p.92).

The truth, which was unveiled by laughter, was articulated in "curses and abusive words", and was consequently able to degrade power (Bakhtin, 1984, p.93). Bakhtin maintains that although the liberating forces of laughter should not be underestimated, the overall meaning of laughter should not be reduced to this aspect. Bakhtin freights laughter with the significant burden of being an interior form of truth which liberates one not only from external censorship but also from gross interior censor (*Ibid.*, p.94). Laughter liberates man from ancient fears such as "fear of the sacred, of prohibition, of the past, of power" (*Ibid.*). He contends that it is impossible to transform laughter into seriousness without "destroying and disturbing the very content of the truth which is unveils" (*Ibid.*):

It unveils the material bodily principle in its true meaning. Laughter opened men's eyes on that which is new, on the future. This is why it not only permitted the expression of an antifeudal, popular truth; it helped to uncover this truth and to give it an internal form. And this form was achieved and defended during thousands of years in its very depths and in its popular-festive images. Laughter showed the world anew in its gayest and soberest aspects. Its external privileges are intimately linked with interior forces; they are a recognition of the rights of those forces. This is why laughter could never become an instrument to oppress and blind the People. It always remained a free weapon in their hands (*Ibid.*).

In the medieval time, people simultaneously distrusted seriousness and preserved confidence in the truth, which the festive laughter uncovered. The common belief was that "fear never lurks behind laughter (which does not build stakes) and that hypocrisy and lies never laugh but wear a serious mask" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.95). More importantly, "[l]aughter created no dogmas and could not become authoritarian; it did not convey fear but a feeling of strength". Laughter was associated with procreation, renewal and abundance as well as foods and drinks and paving the way for the future to come (Bakhtin, 1984, p.95).

In so long as the medieval man distinguished between the official life and the carnival life, the medieval folk humour culture was confined to occasional carnival celebrations. The potential for the creation of a new world order was consequently suppressed unless laughter could gain admission to the world of great literature (Bakhtin, 1984, p.96).

As the Middle Ages drew close to its end, humour and great literature started meeting each other. Popular laughter makes an appearance in the higher genres such as epic. The culture of laughter begins to make its way into "all spheres of ideological life". The process of sidelining official seriousness and fear for the sake of recognising laughter was completed during the Renaissance (Bakhtin, 1984, p.97).

Laughter reached its highest level in the sixteenth century as represented in Rabelais' novel. In the eighteenth century, however, laughter was combined with a dogmatic negation.

Maintaining its bonds with material bodily principle, humour loses its "historical colour" and "acquires the nature of a trivial private way of life" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.101).

The new official culture, which developed in the seventeenth century, fostered rationalism and classicism. This culture advocates "a tendency toward the stability and completion of being, one single meaning, one single tone of seriousness"; therefore, the uncertainty of the grotesque was not favoured. In order to survive, the grotesque resorted to the lower literary genres such as comedy, satire, fable, etc. Subsequently, the nature of the laughter and of the grotesque remained in the official culture, nevertheless, it was "transformed and degraded" (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.101-102).

In the eighteenth century, "the gay, century-old laughter becomes something despicable" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.117). Carnival forms, themes and symbols left a considerable but formalised influence on the eighteenth century literature in the sense that carnival turned into an artistic means to fulfil aesthetic purposes (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.118-119).

Even though the gay positive characteristic of laughter is preserved, the "frankness of the marketplace" changes into privacy, "the indecency of the lower stratum is transformed into erotic frivolity, and gay relativity becomes scepticism and wantonness" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.119). Bakhtin argues that the historically determined culture of folk humour does not object seriousness in general. He further holds that "[b]oth authentic tragedy and authentic ambivalent laughter are killed by dogmatism in all its forms and manifestations" (*Ibid.*, p.121).

One of the important functions of laughter in the historical development of culture and literature, which Bakhtin introduces and elaborates on and which is pivotal to the theory of this research, is the complementary role it performs. Laughter purifies and completes seriousness; in other words, laughter purges dogmatism. Laughter, additionally, displays

liberating qualities. Laughter "liberates from fanaticism, naïveté, and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.123).

In his study of Rabelais' works, Bakhtin describes traits of Romanticists. He contends that Romanticists mentality considers deviations from the static and the routine as justifiable. As a result, Romanticists explain the grotesque and grotesque fantasy "as an artistic presentation of time and of things to come" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.125).

An important point in understanding carnivalesque gestures and images is the fact that "gesticulations and verbal images are part of the carnival as a whole infused with one single logic of imagery" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.149). Bakhtin defines this as the "drama of laughter" which consists of two indispensable elements of death and re-birth. The meaning of each image, albeit separately portrayed, depends on the meaning of all of the images; hence, their vehement ambivalence (*Ibid.*, p. 149).

Julia Kristeva (1986) argues that the carnival laughter is "no simply parodic; it is no more comic than tragic; it is both at once, one might say that it is *serious*" (p.50). Therefore, Kristeva sheds light on an ambiguity which the contemporary society has ascribed to the carnivalesque. She cautions that one must not obscure the dramatic aspects of the carnival which include "murderous, cynical, revolutionary" (*Ibid.*).

Laughter and the forms which are associated with it are concerned with "the contemporary dogmas, valorized systems, fixed definitions, and all hierarchal constructive categories which determine and shape the existing human and social existence" [*sic*] (Singh and Ringo, 2017, p.40).

Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing ground for an absolutely free investigation of it. Laughter is

a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically (Bakhtin, 1981, p.23). However, as Bakhtin contends "the views of body and laughter change over time" (1984, p.66). It is, consequently, crucial to consider that Barker's plays are written and produced in the post-Auschwitz era which is described as "the dark core of the twentieth century" (Mangan, 2013, p.85) considering which is a prerequisite to the appreciation of the modern history.

2.1.3. The Marketplace

Conceding the fact that markets are an old phenomenon in human history which has existed since ancient times, one can understand its multifaceted character in human society. This is a function beyond the commercial focus of trading. As a public place, we can understand how the marketplace could easily accommodate art performances. Given this societal tradition, we appreciate how streets easily became the site of carnival performances, which marked an order that was defined and enforced by the people. Therefore, the marketplace is "a place where people could experience their own collectivity" (Taylor, 1995, p.23). In other words, it was only on the street that carnival's potential could be realised. Breaking the fourth wall, the openness of the marketplace presented itself as the ideal space for free expression for artists such as Barker.

The integrity of the death-birth poles of being which is at the heart of the grotesque is the key to the ambivalence behind images. Once such an integrity is undermined and the poles

become contradictory, the images' direct link to the whole is also severed leading to radical transformation of the images' ambivalence and significance (Bakhtin, 1984, p.150).

Bakhtin defines the marketplace crowd as a group of people who exercised freedom and frankness in expressing themselves verbally. By using speech forms such as abuses, curses, profanities and improprieties, they breached the conventions of verbal address and defied etiquette, civility and respectability. These speech forms break free from conventional norms and "prohibitions of established idioms" (Bakhtin, 1984, pp.187-188). Hence, it can be noted that, the symbiotic relationship between the 'open space' and 'freedom of expression' liberates action and dialogue metaphorically echoing the sense behind the death-birth poles of being. These two attributes of performance provide the right milieu for the flourishing of the grotesque dramaturgy.

Standards of official speech and propriety vary from age to age. Likewise, the speeches and expressions, which are used to speak freely without concerns about euphemism, are specific to each time. Using colloquialism was conducive to an "atmosphere of frankness, inspired certain attitudes, a certain unofficial view of the world" and finally made all mindful players "in that one world of laughter" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.188).

The function of abuse corresponds to that of death, "it is former youth transformed into old age, the living body turned into a corpse. It is the 'mirror of comedy' reflecting that which must die a historic death". As death is followed by regeneration, abuse is also followed by praise (Bakhtin, 1984, p.198). Time is believed to uncrown, to cover with ridicule, kill the old world and create a new world. Popular festive imagery reflects the process of "becoming, its meaning and direction" (*Ibid.*).

Bakhtin contends that individuals who are part of the carnivalesque crowd in the marketplace or in the streets are people as a whole; nevertheless, they are crowd members who are

organised "in their own ways". The contact of bodies makes the individuals that participate in the carnivalesque to feel that they are a vital part of the mass body of the society. All forms and images of medieval popular-festive life bring unity to the people (Bakhtin, 1984, p.198).

Bakhtin further argues that:

The body of the people on carnival square is first of all aware of its unity in time; it is conscious of its uninterrupted continuity within time, of its relative historic immortality. Therefore, the people do not perceive a static image of their unity (eine Gestalt) but instead the uninterrupted continuity of their becoming and growth, of the unfinished metamorphosis of death and renewal (Bakhtin, 1984, 255-256).

One of the most important points about the carnival is that "its images, indecencies, and curses affirm the people's immortal, indestructible character". In the carnival world, the consciousness of human immortality mingles with the understanding of the fact that "established authority and truth are relative" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.226).

Bakhtin then mentions that:

Popular-festive forms look into the future. They present the victory of this future, of the golden age, over the past. This is the victory of all the people's material abundance, freedom, equality, brotherhood. The victory of the future is ensured by the people's immortality (1984, p.256).

Bakhtin emphasises that the birth of the new is as indispensable and inevitable as the death of the old. The better, which is the new, transforms the worse into ridicule and consequently kills it. This transformation, according to Bakhtin, leaves no room for fear because no part is lost or separated from integrity. Consequently, a defining dimension of the carnivalesque is

its future-bound approach and cherishing the act of "becoming" despite the death of the old and the birth of the new. Death does not, therefore, translate into loosing and sorrow given the awareness and fearlessness of the people.

As an aspect of the medieval carnival celebration, the carnivalesque marks the festive period of authorised misrule when the ordinary citizens could make fun of state and church authorities and defame them (Kershner, 2011). The carnival is a form of theatre robbed of footlights which engages everyone by the means of pageants, parades and spectacles (*Ibid.*) Moreover, the carnival features the undermining of crowning and de-crowning rituals, the mockery of all, taking nonsense and using foul language (*Ibid.*).

Bernstein (1992), however, argues that when the question of carnival literary representation arises the issue of foot-lights and the division of actor-spectator, reader-character, and so on works to the least interest of carnival which basically denies these types of divisions; hence, his conclusion that there is a "bitter strand" at the heart of carnival and Saturnalia (p.17).

For Bakhtin, therefore, the very "inversion of established values" is treasured. He cherishes the "life-affirming laughter of carnival" as being able to deliver a "rejuvenated version of the world" (Kershner, 2011). Bakhtin envisions carnival as "a populist utopian vision of the world seen from below and a festive critique, through the inversion of hierarchy, of the 'high' culture". Therefore, carnival resists "fixation and perpetuation of an existing order" (Kim, 2017, p.30).

Carnival is positively defined as having "the effect of plunging certainty into ambivalence and uncertainty, as a result of their emphasis on contradictions and the relativity of all classificatory systems" Carnival and the grotesque both have (Clark and Holquist, 1984, p.304).

The development of life and folk culture, Bakhtin argues, is indebted to "carnival festivities, especially in the feast, the realm of parodic literature and the language of the market place" (Morris and Roberts, 2009, p.195).

Bakhtin's most prominent theories are the theories of the polyphonic novel and the carnival (Groys, 2017, p.2). A distinguishing point of Bakhtin's theory is that it equates "literature to life" (p.2). Groys contends that Bakhtin firmly insists upon the "totality of carnival which destroys and absorbs each individual body: for Bakhtin, carnival is first and foremost a manifestation of the **belonging to the folk** (narodnost')" (*Ibid.*, p.3). Groys believes that democracy has no place in Bakhtin's carnival as everybody is denied the right to shun away from the carnival duty. In fact, those who attempt to abandon the carnival practice become the first targets of ridicule (*Ibid.*). Groys, moreover, mentions that "the carnivalesque laughter has nothing to do with the philosopher's irony over the tragedy of life" (*Ibid.*):

[I]t is the boisterous laughter of people's, or cosmic, "bodily" idiocy over the suffering agony of a tormented individual, who looks ridiculous in his lonesome helplessness. This laughter emerges from the primitive belief that a "people" is something quantitatively and materially larger than an individual, whereas the world is something larger than a people, which is, after all, the belief in the ultimate truth of totalitarianism (2017, p.3).

Bakhtin's theory of the carnival draws on his experience of the Revolution and Civil War. He, however, does not intend to censure the Revolution and the environment created by Stalin against a democratic backdrop. Rather, through the carnival Bakhtin seeks to justify "the absurdity and cruelty of the Revolution, which can be grasped in the a-historic space of pure and universal laughter" (Groys, 2017, p.4).

Groys holds that:

For Bakhtin, carnival is synonymous to a Dionysian mystery: the victim of the Apollonian Stalinist terror interprets it as an act of a ritualistic Dionysian self-destruction – and, by that, overcomes this terror, changing its meaning from inside and inwardly stopping to be its passive victim. It should be noted, though, that this overcoming of a life tragedy through self-sacrifice is devoid, in Bakhtin's viewpoint, of that ecstatic dissolution in the unconscious and impersonal, which, for Nietzsche, constitutes the main pathos of the Dionysian. For Bakhtin, individuality is radically limited and finite. In carnival, its finitude and mortality, at last, become self-evident. The third, laughing, party is represented by people or cosmos – an individual does not have any other choice in carnival but to accept his own destruction as a positive thing - as self-rebirth and self-renewal (2017, p.5).

Critics such as Sergei Sandler (2013) have taken issue with the above-mentioned reading of Bakhtin and have dismissed it as deconstructive. Sandler believes that Bakhtin encourages individuality and is a personalist. Carnival is, therefore, "an attitude, a philosophy; it is not an institution". He believes that carnival imagery is not political and is individually experienced (Sandler, 2013 quoted in Emerson, 2017, p.8).

In spite of Bakhtin's antipathy for theatre, the notion of the carnival thrived in the theatrical arena. The thinness of the dramatic language and the "organization of the language in drama" are two concerns for the inclusion of drama in the carnivalesque realm. The reason being that "drama does not allow for the dialogic interpretation of one language by another which is enabled in novel by the simultaneous presence of the narrator's overarching language along with the language of the characters" (Denith, 1995, p.83).

2.2. Caring through the Carnival

Critics such as Terry Eagleton and Umberto Eco have disputed the liberating qualities which Bakhtin ascribes to the carnivalesque arguing that carnival can act as a comic relief and have dismissed carnival's subversive potentials (Taylor, 1995, pp.48-53). Taylor, however, rejects these arguments and contends that as much as the carnivalesque can remind us of the existing and practiced rules of social hierarchy it can also serve to "prompt us to question their artificiality". Additionally, the carnivalesque has the high potential of offering a site for both "symbolic and real forms of struggle" (*Ibid.*, p.54-56). Eagleton summarises interesting points about Bakhtinian carnival and mentions that carnival:

at once cavalierly suppresses hierarchies and distinctions, recalling us to a common creatureliness not irrelevant to an age gravely threatened with common biological extinction, and at the same time does so as part of a politically specific, sharply differentiated, combatively one-sided practice- that of the lower classes, who incarnate some utopian 'common humanity' at the very moment they unmask their rulers' liberal-minded ideology of 'common social interests' for the shitless, self-interested rhetoric it is (Eagleton, 2003, p.187).

Despite this, one of the most crucial disputes around Bakhtin's theory of carnival pertains to the issue of liberating energies which Bakhtin assigns to carnival. The question is if carnival can truly act as an anti-authoritarian force working against the official culture advocated by the Church and the State while it essentially stems from that culture. Critics have considered carnival as "a safety-valve which in some overall functional way reinforces the bounds of authority by allowing for their temporary suspension" (Denith, 1995, p.71).

Interestingly, Barker disputes Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque on the same grounds. Transformation of the individual on three levels of characters, actors and the audience shapes the heart of Barker's theory of theatre. This metamorphosis must, however, take place through pain and labour; hence, Barker's difficult theatre. In an interview with Rabey, Barker

lays emphasis on the importance of "the breakdown of the conventional reaction of the individual audience member to the action on the stage" (Barker, 2013, p.220) for him. He explains that "the ambiguity of laughter at the moment of awful pain" (*Ibid.*) suggests that the audience is not united. While some audience members have the courage to laugh, others are going through an experience of pain or shock. This is a situation which Barker considers as an achievement resulted from precise action.

Denith does not hold this view, as he argues that Bakhtin is too generous to think that laughter cannot be forced to "serve the purposes of dogmatic intolerance and violence" (1995, p.72). Thus, he states that:

Many of the degradations, acts of violence, murders and massacres perpetrated by Catholics and Protestants on each other were accompanied by carnivalesque activity [...] carnival may not be the source of such violence, but its forms certainly accompanied it; laughter may not build stakes, but those sent to the stake sometimes went with laughter ringing in their ears (*Ibid.*).

Denith's argument brings a very significant aspect of carnivalesque to the forefront and highlights the not-so-human nature of carnivalesque. Despite the existing critiques of carnivalesque, David Edgar proposed carnival as the oppositional form which could flare up hope "using cultural forms to subvert and disarm the *Zeitgeist*" (Edgar, 1987, p.20).

In line with Edgar's contention is the idea by Berger who considers carnival as "the final stage in the progression of the comic from brief interruption of social order to the full-blown construction of a counterworld" (2014, p.79). Berger admits the temporariness of the workings of carnival; however, he explains that comic intrusions can act as "haunting possibilities" with double edges: liberating the individual and making "the guardians of order" uneasy and nervous (*Ibid.*).

Peacock explains that the failure of Marxist-Leninism raised consciousness about potentials of carnivalesque in confronting the authoritarianism of the Thatcherite era. As a model for the oppositional theatrical form, carnivalesque was favoured by many British leftist playwrights and theatre artists and directors. Peacock holds that being born of the nineteen sixties anarchism and being a low form of public expression (contrasting the high form of the mainstream theatre) lead the form to be counted proper for the oppositional theatre (1999, p.124). Peacock further argues that:

It was intrinsically oppositional in that it was born of the anarchism of the 1960s Thatcherites. Its appeal as a model for an oppositional theatrical discourse also emanated from the fact that it was considered to be a "low" form of public expression that bore few of the hallmarks of mainstream high art. In its inversion of the contemporary sociopolitical hierarchy it also reflected the revived anarchistic desire to subvert the cultural hegemony. This had been proposed in the 1960s by the French Situationists who had set out to reveal capitalism's dependency on the creation of specious "needs" and its treatment of everything, including the individual, as a commodity (*Ibid.*).

David Edgar who draws on theories by the Brazilian theatre-practitioner, Augusto Boal (1931-2009) advances the argument that carnival might be practical when employed artistically but not in the real world. He refers to Boal's book, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979), wherein Boal contrasts the Aristotelian dramaturgy, the Brechtian and Boal's own 'poetics of the oppressed' (1987, p.28). Edgar, like Barker rebukes the popular festivities and carnivals of the 1970s and dismisses carnival as a street genre, arguing that carnival is naturally limited. Edgar further elaborates on other deficiencies of carnival as he points out that carnival pends hierarchies while being immediately dependent on them; it is backward, formally conservative and has its roots in "ancient and venerable – if peasant – traditions" (*Ibid.*, p.30). Edgar thus asserts that carnival renders itself practical in the illusory space of

theatre. It is consequently under the light of the carnival – artistic carnival practices on the imaginative stage world – that this thesis seeks to study Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe.

Features that carnival lent the oppositional theatre of the eighties included, but were not confined to: its accessibility for the people (being performed outdoors), its lifting of boundaries between the audience and actors/participants (as spectators could also participate), its being parade-centred making its structure rather fragmentary allowing different theatrical discourses to be engaged (including the verbal, the spectacular, music and dance) (Peacock, 1999, p.125). Additionally, carnival allows ready changes not only to topic but also to the seriousness of the issue around which it centres. Finally, of utmost importance for dramatists of the opposition was carnival's characteristic of subverting hierarchies and violating social norms and rules by the means of "exaggeration, satire, spectacle and the grotesque" (*Ibid.*).

Enjoying the anti-authoritarianism and anti-centralism properties of carnival but opposing the community play, some left-wing playwrights preferred and put forward the theatrically produced carnivalesque as the new theatrical form for the opposition (Peacock, 1999, p.125).

2.3. Summary

Bakhtin's theory of carnival highlights the importance of both the spectator and actor within the moment of expressed laughter and humour. Laughter necessitates a hiatus of feelings and an engagement of the imagination. Bakhtin, moreover, relies on the carnival's life-affirming laughter which is capable of delivering a rejuvenated world. Sharing anarchical qualities, carnival presents people with the freedom in relationship.

From the discussion above, it can be seen that some areas of the contemporary criticism have been depending on Bakhtin's theory of carnival, which is indicative of the significance of the theory. In fact, the carnival theory provides the critic with "access to certain political dimensions of literary works while still remaining grounded in a formalist approach by focusing on the idea of genre" (Kershner, 2011). Bakhtin's approach to humour is capable of being both "subversive social leveler " as well as "affirmative social stabilizer" [*sic*] (Ungar, 2016, p.21).

While Bakhtin's notion of the carnival proper pertains to festivities of people in the Middle Ages as a gay experience which revolves around "rebellious grotesque imagery", the carnivalised literature "relativises contending voices, challenges the centripetal forces that seek to shut them out" (Taylor, 1995, p.47). Moreover, Terry Eagleton argues that by the revitalisation of life in carnivalesque style, "death relaxes our neurotic grip upon it and sets us free for a deeper enjoyment. Such detachment is the reverse of indifference" (2003, p.36).

Bakhtin's carnivalesque offers a fertile field for the examination of the premises of Barker's theory of theatre. The essence of the imagery which permeates the Theatre of Catastrophe consists of Bakhtin's laughter elements which include "laughing chorus" of the medieval market place: "universalism, freedom, and ... [their] relation to the people's unofficial truth" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.90). The carnivalesque by the means of grotesqueries depicts incompleteness and uncertainty. However, it is not "uncertainty for the sake of uncertainty" (Edwards and Graulund, 2013, p.3). The understanding of uncertainty at the heart of Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe is made possible through a study of his texts in the light of the carnivalesque and its crucial component grotesqueries.

As we have demonstrated above, Barker is always one to bring in something new, often blending it with some longstanding traditions. In the following chapters, the analysis of

Barker's plays through the lens of the theory of carnival will be employed, in the main, to shed light on the unique approach which Barker applies to depict unlived lives and unexplored thoughts.

CHAPTER THREE

3. Barker's Dramaturgy through the Lens of Humour

The title Barker has given to his style of theatre, the Theatre of Catastrophe, leaves no room for one to think, at the first encounter, that humour, comedy and laughter would have any place in this serious theatrical enterprise. It is, however, tempting to investigate closely the issue as Barker, in his *Arguments for a Theatre*, sets out to make assertive statements against laughter, humour and comedy. Humour is not intellectually demanding, seeks to provoke pleasure and enhances the flow of the daily life. It is, therefore, argued that humour is "the most common expression of comic" in the daily life of the human beings (Berger, 2014, p.93). In close reading Barker's selected plays in Chapters Three and Four, the emphasis is on the fact that Barker's humour is deliberate but not necessarily explicit.

Michael Patterson, nonetheless, believes that "humour is a constant and welcome element in Barker's work and offers a strategy for ambushing British audiences with political ideas" (2003, p.86). To commence with the argument of the thesis, this chapter studies Barker's most successful plays written in the 1970s in order to depict an image of Barker's early satires and humourous works which do not appear in his later stages of career. However, the characteristics which are presented in these pieces play an important role in the future changes that Barker's theatre goes through.

3.1. *Claw*: An Early Satire

Claw (staged in 1975 and published in 1977), is one of Barker's early satirical plays, which directly deals with politics and society in the course of thirty years after the end of the Second World War. Barker's *Claw* is based on his philosophy that "pain is necessity, which is something different than to state that it is necessary" (Carney, 2013, p.74). *Claw* characterises a turning point in Barker's artistic career in the sense that it led to the transformation of the satirical impulse in his work into a non-realistic style of fantasy, which was devoid of satire (Lamb, 2005, p.12). Although Barker abandons satire in his later works, he does invest in humour as a major component of his Theatre of Catastrophe.

The play, described as entertaining and amusing on the stage (Fisher, 2003), opens when Mrs. Biledew, a munitions worker, returns home carrying her son Noel Biledew, in her arms. Mr. Biledew who has been a prisoner of war with the Germans for five years comes back home to find that his wife has a child. The emasculated Biledew seeks explanation from his wife on his pregnancy and the child. Mrs. Biledew explains to her husband but he does not show anger or react. Rather, he remains calm.

At the age of nine, Noel is already engaged with trading peeks at girls behind lavatories at school, in exchange for their belongings such as mugs, etc. which foreshadows his future career as a pimp. Noel is not successful at school and is expelled before finishing his O levels. Mrs. Biledew requests her husband Victor Biledew to find him a job, which he refuses as reflected below:

MRS. BILEDEW. Help him! (*Enter NOEL, in a leather jacket, some sizes too large. He stands, hands in pockets. She turns to him*) You silly sod (*Pause*) A week before you 'O' levels!

NOEL. No future in it. The accumulations is a blind alley, as far as I can see.

MRS. BILEDEW. On his expulsion form they called him deceitful. Said he hid behind his spectacles! Said he used his handicap as a means of challenging authority! (Barker, 1977, p.134).

Mrs. Biledew mentions that as written on the school expulsion form, the school authorities have an issue with Noel's abuse of his handicap. Noel suffers from very weak eyesight which forces him to wear very thick glasses. His appearance with the glasses makes him look like an idiot and a subject of ridicule. The mechanism which is at work here is that the comic and the grotesque join each other to induce laughter.

Grotesque body, which is a crucial component of the carnival, prevails in the Theatre of Catastrophe. "It is the popular resource, the nexus and embodiment of a set of "negative" oppositional values such as disorder, filth, unrestrained pleasure, and ugliness" (Jones, 2002, p.32). Bakhtin emphasises in *Rabelais and His World* that "contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (1984, p.26). Bakhtin's definition of the grotesque body applies to Noel who decisively seeks to transgress the limits of it.

The first time Victor Biledew speaks to Noel, he admits his hatred for him. Noel, however, confirms that he is used to being loathed. Being hated becomes an integral part of Noel's identity. "From the first day I went to the Infant school they had it in for me. Because of these (*He touches his glasses*) [...]" (Barker, 1977, pp.136), Noel mentions to Biledew. Conscious about his weak eyes, Noel inclines toward a passive-aggressive manner to retaliate the grudges of his grotesque body. His innocence is believed by the school officials to serve merely as a deceitful mask he puts on to abuse his handicap to pose a challenge to the

authority. The explanation on Noel's expulsion form is no doubt exaggerated and is impregnated with an understated humour. In other words, Noel's behaviour and disobedience at school can be unsettling indeed for the school authority; labelling it as a challenge to authority seems rather humorous and overestimated than merely serving as an excuse. The humour that runs in the play has an emphasis on "the grotesque principle of the body and specifically its degradation as a symbolic death" (Hall, 2011, p.72).

Morris and Roberts argue that the representation of human existence through the grotesque realism, especially pictured in the grotesque body serves as the uniting factor for the three spheres which Bakhtin introduces as crucial to the development of life and folk culture, namely, carnival festivities, the realm of parodic literature and finally the marketplace language (2009, p.195).

The grotesque body is not individualized [*sic*]; it is the undying body of all the people, comically debased so that it may be festively reborn. For this reason, all the elements of folk humour are deeply ambivalent; ridicule and abuse are always the other side of praise and celebration, death is always associated with death (2009, p.195).

In the same respect, by reading *Claw* closely this section of the chapter sheds lights on the fact that the grotesque body of primarily Noel plays an undeniably crucial role in developing the plot of the play. On the same note, Noel's grotesque body is the immortal body of all characters of the play. Later in the play, Victor Biledew who has familiarised himself with Marx's thought and the Communists' manifesto while incarcerated encourages Noel to harness his "precious" anger:

BILEDEW. [...] Noel. In an unjust society, the weak will always be persecuted. Just as they brutalized you, so they are brutalized by the system. But when the system falls, so will all forms of cruelty, and boys with bad eyesight will be loved, even by their cuckolded stepfathers ... [*sic*] (Barker, 1977, pp.137-138).

Biledew encourages Noel to take subversive measures to improve the situation. He explains to Noel that those who ridiculed him are themselves victims of a system, which brutalises its subjects, and Noel, therefore, can put an end to this unfair situation. Noel's career thrives ironically to the extent that the Home Secretary becomes one of his clients. The business or the political action as he calls it develops out of control and he falls into a relationship with the Home Secretary's wife, Angie, which engages a roadside intercourse. A police officer notices and approaches them; upon seeing Noel's impudence, the police officer attempts to degrade him because of his weak eyesight questioning his qualification for having a license.

It is common for Barker's characters to struggle with experiences, which lead to estrangement from their selves, their immediate surrounding and other. This struggle, which amounts to wrestling for Barker, consists of an evaluation of both their spiritual and expressive vitality. The actors are consequently tasked with embodying the surge between the opposites (Rabey, 2009, p.9). Therefore, Barker's characters who feel compelled to react to the pain they undergo as a result of wrestling with disastrous and profound experiences choose to "come back on the offensive" against the social causes of their pain (Rabey, 2009, p.9).

Noel hits the police motorcyclist with a brick on his head and jumps on his motorbike. Noel and Angie manage to escape the scene; however, the police motorcyclist clings onto his plate number and as they leave, he is left holding the number plate. Angie demands her husband to drop proceedings against Noel. Noel, who is visiting the couple upon Angie's demand, engages in a conversation with Clapcot, the Home Secretary, which worsens his situation. The conversation between the two can be interpreted in the light of Bakhtin's carnivalesque:

CLAPCOT. The police are dropping proceedings against you. Your nasty little assault is going unpunished. Scamper off with that and be grateful.

NOEL. Scamper off? Where to?

CLAPCOT. The tenements you came from. The hovels they bred you in, you rodent.

Pause.

NOEL. I'm one of you now. I'm your peer.

CLAPCOT. (Sitting leisurely, crossing a leg) It's a common fallacy that extravagance somehow confers a social status. Is it American, I wonder? In any case, the pennies you delved into the gutters for don't make you anyone (Barker, 1977, p.203).

Clapcot believes that the carnival's extravagance has reached its end and so Claw must wake up to the reality. Claw, however, is a carnival participant who enjoyed being one of high social status. Claw is breaking the carnival rule by refusing to admit that he belongs to a working class family. He set out as a revolutionary and ended up as a rebel. Clapcot advises him not to "try to take on the English ruling class" (Barker, 1977, p.204). Noel is eventually arrested by a Special Branch agent.

The attitude of degrading and debasing the high, the official and the sacred is a typical carnival attitude aiming at popular renewal and regeneration (Denith, 1995, p.66). In *Claw*, Barker takes a serious political cause and relates it to the bodily lower stratum. Barker uncrowns the Tory Party through his play *Claw*. The real tension between the official culture and grotesque imagery happens in Act Two in the confrontation of Noel with the Home Secretary. Clapcot reminds Noel that his indulgence in extravagance does not offer him a higher social status. In other words, the carnival is over and Noel is required to scamper off to the tenements he came from (Barker, 1977, p.203).

Act Three begins in Spencer Park Mental Institution where two waiters, Lily and Lusby, are ready to serve breakfast for Noel Biledew. Through lengthy monologues addressing the

audience, the two reflect on their past and reveal that "one is an ex-terrorist, the other a redundant hangman" (Lamb, 2005, p.9). This Scene involves real serving of food which Noel physically eats. According to the stage direction:

(NOEL finishes the fruit juice, LILY removes the glass, then takes a plate of bacon and eggs from the trolley and lays it in front of him. He pours a cup of tea, then delivers it and takes up his original position) (Barker, 1977, p.213).

This is an ultimately carnival scene. In this Scene, Noel is celebrating his death by eating the breakfast offered to him. Referring to Lily and Lusby's monologues, Lamb contends that the relaxed "pace of these speeches serves transitionally to wean the audience from expectations of hectic comic action and to substitute a deepening sense of insecurity" (2005, p.9).

The inversion of values as well as hierarchies and the use of mask are two characteristics of the carnival which one observes in *Claw*. The sense of morality is lost and a degrading lower-body activity is disguised as political action. Masks are not used physically in the common use of the device; however, Noel's pimping business and the name he gives himself (*Claw*) possess a humorous and carnivalesque aspect to it. By targeting the Home Secretary, Noel infiltrates into the heart of the British establishment and consequently jeopardises the sense of morality which one expects to rule the Secretary's house. Noel reveals the darker side of the establishment and its moral corruption to subvert the power they exercise in ruling the people. He basically seeks to undermine the official moral system and to advocate the idea that this situation could be applied to other realms of life such as politics, social issues, etc.

Ironically, Nora does not consider engagement with prostitution as degrading; however, she is offended when Noel sends his first client who is a Policeman to her. She feels so degraded

that as she explains she refuses to have an intercourse with “a class enemy” (Barker, 1977, p.147).

Rabey argues, "Barker's characters more usually respond to their pain by coming back on the offensive against its social causes" (2009, p.9). He further notes that the early stage of Barker's career as a playwright features "savagely comic attacks on the promises of social authority; an authority which achieves its end through various forms of confidence trickery" (2006, p.14). The situations which Rabey describes vis-à-vis Barker's theatre apply to *Claw* as well. Although *Claw* is an early play by Barker, it features not only satire and comedy but also tragedy.

3.1.2. Barker's Dramaturgy in the Making

Despite the play's indulgence in humour, "an awareness of the stifling straitjacket of the tragic ideology and the inevitable politics that arise from apprehending this worldview" informs the play. "The truth that gradually emerged for Biledew is a rejection of a certain tragic vision in favour of an orthodox dialectical materialism (Carney, 2013, p.74).

Satire is defined as the intentional use of "the comic for purposes of attack" (Berger, 2014, p.146). The attack is usually targeted at political or religious institutions and their representatives (*Ibid.*). Given this definition of satire, *Claw* can be easily identified as a satirical play targeting the corruption and immunity of a Tory Home Secretary which represents the entire or part of the political system of which Barker is critical. Moreover, it also attacks the ways of the middle class people and the harms their simplistic interpretation of political treatises may cause.

In *Claw*, Barker blurs the boundary which otherwise exists between the realm of the humorous and tragic. Unlike in Barker's later plays, which will be discussed in the next chapter of the study, the humour that exists in *Claw* and *Stripwell* are natural stemming from the identity and mindset of the characters. However, in his later plays, Barker begins to write more sophisticated humorous dialogue. Additionally, grotesque imagery which was indispensable from the appearance of a character such as Noel Biledew (his weak eyesight) ceases to appear as such in the plays which will be discussed later. In other words, in his later plays Barker makes a greater effort to depict images, either grotesque or humorous. Finally, even though *Claw* does not feature a full-scale play of the Theatre of Catastrophe, it is informed of elements of the carnivalesque which is an under-acknowledged aspect of Barker's art of theatre.

3.2. *Stripwell*: Balancing the social classes

Social class has always been a major subject of grouping people in society, especially in Britain following the organisation of aristocrats, middle class and working class popularised by different social orders. Playwrights have for years mirrored the complexities of classes in their plays as far back as Shakespearean times. Barker is not different from his predecessors. Even though *Stripwell* (staged in 1975 and published in 1977), struggles to maintain a stance in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe, the play's engagement with a middle-class comedy impregnates it with aspects of the carnivalesque. *Stripwell* was written as a commercial play; and being a political satire, does not meet Barker's criteria of the Theatre of Catastrophe. *Stripwell*, which depicts challenging and unlikely contradictions in its characters' lives,

characterises a kind of humour that verges on "the disturbing grotesque" (Patterson, 2003, p.88).

Stripwell, which was first performed in 1975, depicts the life of a judge, Graham Stripwell, his family and a criminal, Cargill, whom he sentences to prison. Cargill threatens Stripwell that he would murder him once he is released. Highly disturbed by the threat, Stripwell talks about the issue with the young go-go dancer, Babs, with whom he is in a relationship. The action's denouement is founded in one concise scene with no preparations (Patterson, 2003, p.88).

Stripwell's ill-tempered father-in-law lives with him and his wife Dodie. Stripwell and Dodie's ambitious son, Tim, meet Babs who abandons Stripwell's plan for leaving and instead goes with Tim. Tim, who is engaged with the lucrative drug smuggling business, has plans to expand his business by importing elephants while he actually intends to hide narcotics inside female elephants' wombs. Stripwell cannot accept being deserted by Babs who chooses his son to him. Thus Stripwell, in a rage of jealousy reports his son's intentions for drug-trafficking to the police. This is too much to take for Dodie, his wife, hence she walks out on him. Upon regaining his liberty, Cargill finally returns and murders Stripwell. *Stripwell's* structure, form and content make it a successful commercial play which also features delicate details which are harbingers of a possible shift in Barker's style.

Stripwell employs versatile devices and means to go beyond naturalism. Instances include direct address to the audience. Another example is Bab's speaking her own stage directions while engaged in writing her autobiography. The appearance of the ice-cream seller that Babs calls "Godot" (Patterson, 2003, p.88) also conveys a sense of an absurdist play albeit unlikely. One may also refer to the play as featuring psychological realism by mentioning Dodie's confession of past infidelity to Stripwell (*Ibid.*).

It is, therefore, typical of Howard Barker not to "box himself into a single style and [fill] his piece with rich contradictions" (Patterson, 2003, p.89). Contradictions contribute to the humour in the play and the play's comedy is multi-levelled including visual humour, jokes and gags. Stripwell's blacks, asking Jarrow for a decision only to ignore it and other gags the play relies on for laughter create a comedy (Patterson, 2003, p.90). Patterson believes that:

There is simple visual humour, as with Stripwell's entrance in I,6 sporting two black eyes. There are running jokes, as in Jarrow being offered a choice and his decision being promptly ignored, and these are old gags, as in someone being asked to speak louder and then overdoing it (2003, p.90).

Dexterously Barker engages with the grotesque "as a kind of humour that is at once funny and disturbing; where the contradictions are felt most strongly" (Patterson, 2003, p.90). For instance, Tim's plan to smuggle drugs into the country by concealing them in the female organs of elephants is extravagantly grotesque (*Ibid.*):

TIM. ... Today's criminal is tomorrow's pioneer. I sense a knighthood in the offing, when the import of narcotics is legitimized. (*Pause*) In the meantime let me inform you that an elephant's vagina is six feet long. Its womb can carry several hundred weight. A pair of female elephants can consequently carry in these cavities one ton of heroin, in 2 lb. plastic packets, very neat ... [*sic*] (Barker, 1977, pp. 71-72).

Firstly, this is an image which is inventive. An elephant's womb is the most unlikely place to hide drugs - an idea in which Tim seriously intends to invest. Secondly, this grotesque image entails a vehemently humorous element which in general creates an atmosphere more conducive to the Romantic grotesque by verging on sarcasm. Additionally, the figure of

Stripwell himself as a judge with no moral sense making him no better than the convicts he sentences shapes the central grotesque element of the play (Patterson, 2003, p.90).

As it was mentioned earlier, *Stripwell* is a satirical play and such plays highly depend on the social context and are bound by it (Berger, 2014, p.147). As with *Claw*, *Stripwell* also targets the middle class which in this case happen to be a part of the political system (Graham Stripwell as a judge). The above-mentioned quote by Tim portrays the shortcomings of the ruling party and directly attacks it.

Effervescent laughter "at the arbitrariness of the manners and mores that lock people in their social spaces" constitutes a crucial aspect of carnival festivities (Sobchack, 1996, p.179). *Stripwell* is constantly a target of such carnivalesque laughter with the most arbitrary situation of all characters. The most arbitrary situation of all characters belongs to Stripwell himself. He does not emotionally belong to where he stands in his life; married with a son and a whining father-in-law who lives with the family. As a result, Stripwell has created a parallel world for himself through his relationship with Babs who represents carnival festivity and joy in her laid-back principal-less approach to life. Stripwell, who is someone with authority, at least as a judge, succumbs to Babs and her seductive power. Ironically, he fails to not only manage his family but also his affairs with this girl who finally deserts him; hence, Stripwell's displacement.

In an email to Rabey on 31 July 2007, Susan Russel argues that:

Through text and setting, Barker insists that the actor exists within discontinuities and disruptions of time and place; therefore, a Barker actor must constantly define and re-define the text and the performing self through engagements with displacement (Rabey, 2009, p.13).

Barker uses language and text in a vehement manner in order to depict images, which "challenge, subvert or surpass conventional modes of definition". Moreover, exactitude of expression remains a tool for Barker's characters to portray their existence (Rabey, 2009, p.13). In *Stripwell*, Babs, "a drop-out from Reading University" (Barker, 1977, p.14) is writing her autobiography. She has quitted school, has ambitions as suggested by writing her memoirs, and makes references to Samuel Beckett and his *Waiting for Godot* on and off. These characteristics make her overqualified as a dancer who is in a relationship with an impotent judge.

In the same light that Bakhtin's heteroglossia was achieved through narrowing the colloquial and the formal languages by mingling people during carnival festivities, Barker also tried to "reclaim language from a sense of social crisis expressed as social determinism" (Rabey, 2003, p.182). Therefore, to evade naturalism, Barker uses a sophisticated articulation which adds more colours to his dialogue and is in contrast with the language of ordinary people advocated by carnival.

Contrary to the carnival's cult of using vernacular language and taboo words, Theatre of Catastrophe accentuates the articulacy of its characters. Barker claims that this practice is intended to avoid naturalism. Additionally, it suggests that Barker's characters are entrapped in between the real world and the-world-to-be. They go through the experience of another world, that is, they experience what could have happened to them should another world order was allowed. The door, however, is slammed in their face in precisely the same manner Chekhov showed Vanya the way but denied him the opportunity to exit. Stripwell is stranded by his desire to leave his current situation. "I loathe Brighton. I have always loathed Brighton. God knows how many times I have asked to be transferred to another circuit. Last time my application went astray ..." (Barker, 1977, p.11), Stripwell says to Babs. He falls victim to his impotence and failure to make sensible decisions.

One of the most significant issues, which Barker discusses in *Arguments for A Theatre*, is how he has been seeking to create a theatre, which offers the right to interpret to his audience and the transgression of the aspects, which are considered sacred in the contemporary theatre such as clarity and realism (Barker, 1997, p.51). Barker argues about the moral crisis which can open an “aperture for a new kind of theatre” (1997, p.51), the moments of loss and so many other issues which had occupied his creative mind. Moral crises are certainly, part and parcel of *Stripwell*. Graham shares a very obscure sense of morality. His understanding of what is morally right to do clash with his common sense in most of the situations and even though he goes for the moral he ends up as a loser. Instances of this include his fear of Cargill's threat and his decision to report Tim's intention to the police.

Barker takes his audience on a journey which they need to make an effort to make sense of. One of the most important aspects of this journey is that each audience member must experience and interpret it on his own. Barker, moreover, repudiates any official interpretation ascribed to it (Barker, 1997, p.46).

Barker argues that the current public moral crises of the society calls for a new kind of theatre in which its creative tension is located between the audience and the stage itself rather than between characters and arguments (1997, p.52). The intervention of this theatre in the human relations takes place at an earlier stage than before. Barker argues that the contemporary theatre usually focuses on how human beings live in relation to one another based on the “given moral predicates”. He, however, believes that now that there is a problem with the predicates themselves, a “braver theater” asks the audience to question the “validity of the categorization it lives by”[sic] (*Ibid.*, p.52).

This new theatrical practice is giving its audience an opportunity for personal re-assessment in the light of dramatic action and as it has as its constituents “the abolition of routine

distinctions between good and bad actions, the sense that good and evil co-exist within the same psyche, that freedom and kindness may not be compatible, that pity is both a poison and erotic stimulant, that laughter might be as often oppressive as it is rarely liberating” (Barker, 1997, p.52). Then, this, which consequently leads to a modern form of tragedy, is called Catastrophism. In Act Two, Scene Four, Tim is leaving and so is Stripwell who feels conscious-stricken and apologises to Dodie for his "atrocious timing":

DODIE. Not it's just me and Jarrow ... in and out the rose trees ... (Pause.)
Blimey, talk about Chekhov I can't breathe for this stink of melancholy (p.93).

Stripwell shares intertextuality with Chekhovian oeuvre as well. While writing the play, Barker had still been preoccupied with the notions of melancholia and compromise, which are pivotal to the Chekhovian thought. Dodie's statement about melancholy and his remembrance of Chekhov are sarcastic references to the Chekhovian melancholy. Ironically enough, she recalls Chekhov while she is feeling suffocated. Therefore, since mid-seventies Barker has been struggling with his contempt for the Chekhovian spirit and his cherishing of compromise. Barker, however, shatters the Chekhovian sacredness in *Stripwell*. Patterson argues that:

Paradoxically Cargill's violent refusal to compromise is the most positive image of the play, an unsettling challenge to the middleclass Stripwells and Dodies, who would have been mirrored by the Royal Court audience, happily applauding this attack on the comfortable compromises by which they lived their lives (2003, p.93).

Apart from the melancholy which was explained above, *Stripwell* resembles Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* in different respects. Interestingly Graham Stripwell's impotency does remind one of Uncle Vanya's passiveness. Jarrow shares features possessed by Serebryakov in Chekhov's play. Both characters are far less achieving than what their families think. For example, Dodie, like Maria Vasilyevna Voynitsky, Serebryakov's mother-in-law and Uncle Vanya's mother who supports Serebryakov in all circumstances, does not fail to support his father. She even mentions that their son, Tim, can write Jarrow's biography or make a documentary of his life (Barker, 1977, pp.21-22). Babs, for example, can be considered as a counterpart to Yelena with her seductive behaviour and lively manners. It is, therefore, tempting to consider that Barker has modelled his play on Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*.

Apart from humour, portraying a grotesque image of the body especially with regard to Tim's intention to use elephants for drug smuggling, hackneyed celebrations are indispensable from *Stripwell*. Drinks are served less to celebrate or as a sign of festivity but rather to cope with the awkwardness of the situation. In Act Two, Scene Six when Babs runs away with Tim, Stripwell returns home most embarrassed.

He asks Dodie for a drink but cannot decide what to drink; Dodie then suggests whisky. Dodie offers several times to Stripwell to run a bath for him because he is "wringing wet"; Stripwell shows no enthusiasm though. Dodie intends to baptise Stripwell. Dodie who is content to have him back is even ready to forgive him. She cannot afford to take Stripwell's "first just thing" (Barker, 1977, p.114).

By giving the information about Tim's drug trafficking ambitions to the police, Stripwell gives Dodie a mortal blow. His wrong timing of making the call to the police station makes Stripwell's process of moral recovery even more ridiculous and meaningless.

DODIE. Well, Strip discovers his soul. (*Pause. She walks a little way, stops*) Of course, those who haven't had the benefit of hearing your inspiring story of moral recovery will be in the appalling position of having to judge you according to their common sense. (*Pause*) They'll say you grassed on him because he pinched your mistress. (*Pause*) And I'll go all the bloody way with them! (Barker, 1977, p.115).

Another example of hackneyed celebration occurs at the end of the play. The stage direction describes Stripwell:

... He leans on it a moment, then takes a whisky bottle and a glass. He pours a drink, holds it in his hand a few seconds, runs his hand through his hair, and finally, with supreme relief, lifts the glass to his lips ... (Barker, 1977, p.121).

Even the surname Stripwell is carnivalesque in nature. 'Strip', as a verb, means to remove your clothing; moreover, 'well' in the sense of doing it in the best way possible. Additionally, Babs is a go-go dancer who calls Graham Stripwell "Strip". The reference, therefore, to the bodily lower strata makes an all-inclusive presence in the play to degrade the protagonist, who is, ironically a judge.

The re-modelled theatre of old

Stripwell, as a comic play, depicts the early stage of Barker's career when he still practiced satire and tragedy had not taken over the *raison d'être* of his works. The carnival elements which were discussed in this chapter with regard to *Stripwell*, are transformed and employed in his tragic plays. Barker averts the "fatuous giggle of comedy" and dismisses it as the "deafening chorus" of the current age. Therefore, a play such as *Stripwell* lays foundation for

obscuring the boundaries of comedy and tragedy in his later works. *Stripwell's* significance for this research is nonetheless twofold. Firstly, the practice of humour in the play and secondly, the depiction of the lingering Chekhovian nostalgia which highlights Barker's urge for abandoning moral predicates and naturalistic practice.

3.3. *The Love of a Good Man: Feast of the death*

The Love of a Good Man (staged in 1978 and published in 1980) is explicitly about death and the wounds left by war with a straightforward approach to the subject with the action taking place on grounds which are made of flesh. The play opens in Passchendaele in 1920, when the battlefield is left desolate after the end of the First World War. Edward, Prince of Wales, is visiting the battlefield where a cemetery is to be built. He is supposed to choose indiscriminately the body of a soldier for a national memorial, which will be held at the Westminster Abbey. The play is described by reviewers as managing "to raise a few laughs with comical characters like the prince" (Whitelaw, N/A) and as being "a bleak tale" (Bommer, 1994).

Prince Edward and the Gentleman spot a man, Flowers, who is busy digging with the Prince wishing to talk to him. Shouting at him, the Gentleman makes him understood that they need to talk to him. As he approaches the Prince inquires if he has been a war soldier to which Flowers answer is positive. The idiotic Prince asks for his permission to kiss his hands and knees down to do so. He does so hoping to appear in the papers. The attention-hungry Prince reveals his intention of being seen and worries more about the satin on his suit than the soldier.

The arrival of an aristocratic Englishwoman, Mrs. Toynbee, who seeks to find the corpse of her son and take it back to England to bury beneath an ancestral apple tree marks the main action of the play (Lamb, 2005, 187). Lalage, Mrs. Toynbee's young daughter, accompanies her mother who has a way with men. Mrs. Toynbee makes the former undertaker, Mr. Hacker, fall in love with her body, which is compelling enough for him to offer incentives to soldiers working for him to make extra effort to find her son's mortal remains. Even though it is illegal to expatriate soldier's corpses out of the former battlefield, Mrs. Toynbee severely insists on this and manages to persuade Mr. Hacker to assist her with getting the transfer done.

Mr. Hacker's soldiers succeed in finding a corpse, which they claim, is Mrs. Toynbee's son. Mrs. Toynbee, therefore, insists that they smuggle the mortal remains to England by placing them in a box labelled tools. Both Mr. Hacker and the soldiers know that the corpse does not belong to Billy Toynbee; notwithstanding, they pretend that it is him in full awareness of the impossibility of the quest.

It does not seem out of context that Mrs. Toynbee would seek to label the box carrying her son's mortal remains as "tools". On the contrary, his son's dead body is cruelly used by every character in the play to reach his or her goal, be it calming one's conscience, fulfilling the authorities' longing for enhanced relations, satisfying one's lust or earning the offered incentives.

Lalage expresses her opposition to her mother's request for retrieving his brother's corpse acknowledging that three years after the battles this would be impossible. She does neither believe that the exhumed body is his brother's; nor is she willing to support her mother for smuggling the body to England.

While Mr. Hacker and his people are hectically engaged with the project of the cemetery, Mr. Bride, the Chief Graves Commissioner, informs them that the Prince of Wales is visiting soon and their cemetery is the only one that is close to completion. Even though there are at least one hundred corpses to be buried, Mr. Hacker, promises to finish the project in time for the official ceremony to be attended by the Prince.

To fulfil their pledge, Clout suggests that they burry four bodies in one grave to handle the work load. Reluctantly, Hacker agrees and they enter a contract. Desperate to enjoy the reward Mrs. Toynbee has promised him, Mr. Hacker requests Clout to find a way to get Billy Toynbee to be buried and honoured as the Unknown Soldier. Clout writes the number assigned to Billy Toynbee in a book "three 'undred thousand times" (Barker, 1980, p.57) for Prince Edward to randomly choose one by a pin while blindfolded.

The notion of death prevails the piece which is set in a battlefield where embraces more human bodies than the earth (Lamb, 2005, p.191). Moreover, the exhumation of the mortal remains is an act "of profound violation, showings of what should remain hidden within nature" (Lamb, 2005, p.192).

Unearthing the bodies and burying them create a carnival framework within whose scope the very act of exhumation of dead bodies translates into their re-birth for the reason that they regain their identities and are saved from remaining unknown. Exhuming becomes more regenerating than birth itself.

Mrs. Toynbee ties the fate of her son's corpse to that of her physical pleasure. She offers herself to Hacker for the sake of retrieving her son's corpse back to England to bury it under an apple tree. When Prince Edward picks Billy's number, he announces that he will be buried at the Tomb of Unknown Warrior at Westminster Abbey. She, however, remains unsatisfied, as this is not what she was hoping for.

When Mr. Bride receives the book with soldiers' numbers back from Prince Edward, he notices that all the pages bear the same number. He deems that he has gone out of his mind and so tells Mr. Hacker who also confirms Mr. Bride's thought without further elaborating on it. Mrs. Toynbee accomplishes the desired result through:

English compromise: both she and the state are satisfied, only Hacker, used by both sides, is left in despair. The penultimate scene involves an attempt to make contract with the dead by conducting a séance on the battlefield – a project that descends into chaotic farce (Lamb, 2005, p.188).

Enthralled by Sylvia Toynbee, Prince Edward tells her "I w – w – would like you to be my mistress, please" (Barker 1980, p.66). Sylvia Toynbee seeks to avoid an answer by saying that the circumstances are not ripe for such talk taking into account Mr. Ride's illness. Mr. Ride attempts suicide and end up injuring his eye as he misses the shooting.

The "very childish, and very weak" Prince Edward insists that she must make a pledge that she loves him:

PRINCE. Swear you love me.

MRS TOYNBEE. I said yes.

PRINCE. Say you wanted me from the first day we met.

MRS TOYNBEE. Really, you're a little bit too forward.

PRINCE. GOT TO! GOT TO!

She looks coolly at him.

MRS TOYNBEE. You are very childish, and very weak ... I don't think you will make much of a king.

PRINCE. Poor old England. Rotten luck. (Pause, Then with desperation.) I WANT TO F – F – F – (He shuts his eyes in despair.) FUCK YOUR CUNT! (Barker, 1980, p.67).

Apart from the corpses, graves and cemetery which mark the grotesque elements of the play, both Lalage and Mrs. Toynbee are incapable of establishing intercourses with their lovers. Their bodies are imperfect as well as grotesque. In this respect, the piece degrades the high notions of chivalry, heroism and the grief of war to lower body strata; thus, making the play not only a comic one but also one enriched with carnival elements.

Scene One of Act Two depicts a full-scale carnival image with the Prince imitating his father.

PRINCE. I – I – I am the head of what they call the British Establishment.

GENTLEMAN. NO.

PRINCE. The g – g – great British Establishment that sends young soldiers to their deaths.

GENTLEMAN. WRONG SPEECH.

PRINCE. No more of that. No more death. I am King Edward and I won't have deaths! Finish with that. Altogether better establishment from now on. Promise (Barker, 1980, p.54).

Allowing Edward a role reversal, Howard Barker creates a second life for his characters in his plays the same way carnival was "the people's second life" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.8). One of the naturalistic devices which Barker makes use of in *The Love of a Good Man* is the constant stammering by Prince Edward. His stammering not only creates a naturalistic effect which is a characteristic of the carnivalesque but also leads to a comic effect.

Observing Sylvia Toynbee's unfaithfulness to him, Hacker decides to inform her that the corpse does not belong to Billy Toynbee. "Billy ain't the corpse rattling on the royal train [...] Your boy never did show up. And never will" (Barker, 1980, pp. 68-69). Mrs. Toynbee does not take him seriously as for her the disk around the corpse's neck suffices to prove it was Billy.

Lalage's reasons for avoiding supporting her mother's illegal intention engage the two in a conversation about her viewpoint. Lalage believes that they are shaping a new world, which is based on justice and equality:

LALAGE. [...] And the way treat the dead will show our intentions about all the rest. They have decided to abolish all distinctions in the graveyards. The same style for everyone. I accept it. If we cannot even manage that, what will happen to the rest of it?

MRS TOYNBEE. You are a socialist.

LALAGE. Is that what it is?

MRS TOYNBEE. Yes.

LALAGE. Probably I am, then.

MRS TOYNBEE. You are for this regulation. This monotonous equality (Barker, 1980, p.39).

Barker's socialist opinions find an outlet in Lalage. Weeks argues that:

Barker is more than a disaffected socialist. In scorning monolithic ideologies and totalities of knowledge, in seeking to demolish common moral propositions, in asserting the provisionality of truths, in pursuing the destabilizing and resistant moment, in creating histories rather than History, he demonstrates his affinities with post-structuralist interests and methodologies [*sic*] (2001, p.69).

The Love of a Good Man situates its characters in a catastrophe-stricken landscape and depicts their struggles to face their new circumstances which is a part of a greater political milieu in the verge of shaping a new world order. By doing so, Barker then traces his characters' "tenuous attempts to impose order onto the chaos created by history and their own emotions" (Cooper, 2013, p.57). Each character, notwithstanding, forms his or her unique perception of such order and makes effort to create it based on his or her best interest.

In *The Love of a Good Man* and *The Europeans*, Barker explores the twentieth century catastrophes such as the world wars. He, however, contends in an interview with Rabey and Gritzner that his protagonists tend to avoid historical moments and this can happen even through their absolute solitude which he considers as an unperformed kind of suicide (Barker, 2006, p.36). Barker explains that social context is diminished from his work but it is by no means overcome; for him, the social context might possess oppressive or catastrophic characteristics but for one thing Barker's characters do not let the social context eradicate their ambitions (*Ibid.*).

3.4. Summary

This chapter mainly focused on plays of Barker's early stage of career, *Claw*, *Stripwell* and *The Love of a Good Man*. Even though these plays featured satire, they also possessed elements of carnival in terms of their comic verbal compositions. In these plays Barker intentionally and successfully disrupted the established morality and transgressed redlines of obedience and subordination. He authorised his characters to exceed the limits of their social and political agency and experiment with arenas in the socio-political and economic realm, which were novel to them. However, the prices he made his characters pay for the brand-new life they experienced were pain and anxiety. In the foregoing plays, we have seen how Barker displays the rare artistic disdain for the confines of convention by confronting and breaking longstanding dramatic traditions as well as stretching the borders that exist between the artist and art to invent new frontiers in drama.

This chapter has introduced Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe and the playwright's contempt for naturalism and social realism. The humour and the comedy, which underlined Barker's play, proved how Barker shaped his cult of comedy and came up with his comic style, which is embedded in his Theatre of Catastrophe.

The courage to practice one's will is advocated by Barker in his arguments. Therefore, despite seemingly disparaging and distrusting humour and comedy, Barker thrives in creating comedies with double edges. For Barker knowing is not sufficient; hence, an environment needs to be created to both acknowledge one's awareness and to take action which would be otherwise undoable in a rather real world.

It is also partially the task of the spectator to defamiliarise what he is watching. As Henri Bergson believed the "logic of the imagination" operates differently compared to "the logic of the reason" (1911, p.41). This is, therefore, how the spectators' analysis must engage itself in the perception of the comic. This kind of absurdity which exists within the comic can result from the function of our imagination in imposing our ideas on what we see rather than thinking of what we are actually seeing (*Ibid.*, p.184).

Barker's characters are dynamic and his spectators are offered the privilege of experiencing moments of pain and anxiety in favour of becoming. Hence, Barker's contention that "ordering of experience is posterior, and not anterior, to the event witnessed". Characters in the Theatre of Catastrophe are not sympathetic because to sympathise is to recognise; whereas, the dynamic character "is one who commands attention, whose actions are mesmeric, impulsive and unlicensed, not insane but socially criminal, whose virtues are explorations, and not ratifications, of the normal" (Barker, 1979, p.111).

Howard Barker has been a determined dramatist and did not necessarily have to wait for a situation to become ripe for him to establish his own style of writing and performance. Even

though the circumstances were mostly at odds with what would have made his desirably successful reception of his plays, he was not hindered with obstacles on his way.

Barker not only repudiated but also abandoned both naturalism and social realism in favour of an articulately worded style. His plays required performance techniques, which would go beyond the commonly and traditionally perceived modes of performance. Barker describes social realism as a dominant and decayed theatre ideology and compares it to the functioning of social realism in the Stalin era. He believes that socialist realism has political ambitions which include but are not confined to projects of enlightenment and social control (2006, p.37). The major issue which Barker takes against social realism is its conduciveness to the decline of theatre language and form as well as decay in the author's function which is characterised by imagination. Social realism and "a people's society" necessitate relevance which is at odds with imagination depriving the theatre of the power of imagination and contributing to social control exerted by sham democracies (Barker, 2006, p.37).

CHAPTER FOUR

4. Comedy in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe: The Comic as Social Leveller

An essential component of Barker's comedy of life includes "delicate oscillations" as it is represented in some of his plays through the idea of sexuality; oscillating between conquering and submitting, among other things (Rabey, 2009, p.15). Barker rebukes the diseased comedy (Barker, 1997, p.36). It is therefore important to define the boundaries of comedy and humour in Barker's catastrophic tragedies.

Hamdan argues that carnivalesque playwrights take the existing hierarchy turn it upside down and depict a miniature-sized reversed situation. They offer a carnivalesque experience to the audience without engaging them. He, however, argues that modern anti-carnivalesque grotesque relies on estrangement, highlights the negative aspects of hierarchies and offers mixed types which portray estranged situations and characters in a reductive manner "all in a closed and stifling space and in linear time" (2006, p.80). Modern anti-carnivalesque grotesque abandons the characteristics of the carnivalesque grotesque. Hamdan further argues that this type of grotesque serves the purposes of those who desecrate collective holiness and consider death as detached from renewal (*Ibid.*).

Barker's very reliance on the humour and comedy in the Theatre of Catastrophe validates humour as a powerful device by arguing against the degrading characteristics attributed to the genre. Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe is comparable to the tragic theatre in the sense that it insists "on the limits of tolerance as its territory"; its area is the area of "maximum risk both

to the imagination and invention of its author, and to the comfort of its audience” (Barker, 1997, p.52). The kind of the experience, which the audience goes through in connection with what it witnesses, cannot be related to entertainment; rather, it leads to pain and resentment. Therefore, as it is the case with all new theatre, the audience needs to be prepared and educated in its own freedom, to be liberated from its fear of obscurity and to be encouraged to welcome its moments of loss. These moments of loss include “the breaking of the narrative thread, the sudden suspension of the story, the interruption of the obliquely related interlude, and a number of devices designed to complicate and to overwhelm the audience’s habitual method of seeing” (Barker, 1997, p.53).

One of the complains about this kind of theatre takes form in charging it of pessimism which Barker dismisses by explaining that pain and apparent defeat are not “synonymous with pessimism” (Barker, 1997, p.53). In contradiction to the traditional tragedy, which was “a restatement of public morality over the corpse of a transgressing protagonist”, in the Theatre of Catastrophe there is “no restoration of certitudes” and the audience is freed into authority (Barker, 1997, p.54).

Barker believes that:

[...] theatre is the witnessing of embodied language, or languages; it is the witnessing of language which has achieved the status of an action via the sensitized body of the actor. In order that the mind may achieve a focus equal to the exigencies of this specific activity, Barker is insistent that certain conditions are necessary to the nurturance of the spectator's willing involvement, a process he calls "seduction", which is entrusted to the actor as a primary task [*sic*] (Price, 1995, p. 27).

Barker seeks to restore language "to its pre-eminence in a theatre that aspires to the status of a radical art form" (Lamb, 2005, p.41). Nonetheless, in plays such as *The Castle*, *The Bite of*

the Night and *The Europeans*, Barker uses a range of "class styles of speech" (Thomas, 1998, p.174). The above-mentioned plays feature lively and amiable scenes as well as well-articulated and sophisticated parts (*Ibid.*). This chapter focuses on most significant plays of Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe to study the hypotheses put forward in the first chapter of the thesis.

4.1. *The Power of the Dog* and *The End of War*

Written in 1981 and staged by Joint Stock in 1984, *The Power of the Dog* is set in 1944 before the end of the Second World War when Winston Churchill is paying a visit to Kremlin to discuss dividing the Europe. Joseph Stalin has employed a Scottish clown, Archie McGroot, to entertain the British leader while in Kremlin. Apart from Kremlin, the play's actions also take place in the battlefields of Poland where a fashion model/photographer, Ilona, seeks to depict war atrocities only to face her sister's hanging corpse which makes her embark on a journey to demystify her death.

The opening scene of the play specifically features many humorous moments thanks to the clown. In fulfilling his task, McGroot touches on a variety of issues ranging from the Kulak (Russian peasants who fell victim to Stalin's forces collectivisim), communism, disastrous fates of women in Manchuria and the negligence of the Scotsmen by the British rulers. McGroot's wit and intelligence outweighs the intelligence of both the English and Russian leader. Cooper (2013) argues that McGroot's attempts at "humorous allegory" fails under "the gravity of Stalin's hegemony"; consequently, the "power of comedy to provide release

through laughter is thus devitalised and finally splutters out, marking an end to the impulses and efficacy of farce and satire in Barker's work" (p.60).

The negotiations between Churchill and Stalin are disrupted by hackneyed interpretations by the English and Russian interpreters leading to a humorous downgrading of the discussion over the destiny of millions of people. *The Power of the Dog* is, therefore, "a stark parody, a kind of negative X-ray image, of the materialist conception of history" (Carney, 2013, p.81).

The opening scene, however, is a complete incarnation of a carnival characterising role reversals. *The Power of the Dog* anticipates "Stalinism's final moments in the collapse of the Soviet empire in 1989" (Weeks, 2001, p.59). The two high-ranking officials without even suspecting the quality of their talks, engage with the most banal conversation while the comedian is the person who expresses concerns about the situation in war-torn areas as well as the plight and pain of women among other things. The interpreters further degrade the discussion as they constantly fail to deliver the message home.

McGROOT: In Manchester a geezer is lookin' at a woman in a train. In Manchuria they cuttin' a woman's breasts off wi' a bayonet, ye gotta laugh, noo, ye gotta laugh!

MOLOTOV: I propose a toast –

SOV. INTERPRETER: Molotov toasts –

MOLOTOV: Mrs Churchill!

CHURCHILL, ETC: My wife.

McGROOT: The woman in Manchester says to the woman in Manchuria, this geezer keeps starin' at me, wha' shall I do?

CHURCHILL: Tell Stalin, if he wants to meet women in trains he should be a clerk –

McGROOT: So the woman from Manchuria says, ye call tha' a problem, A got ten soldiers here and gonna murder me! Ooh, says the woman from Manchester, but they're beasts, a'nt they? **Noo funny! Tha's noo funny! Tha' is a fuckin' disgrace!** (Barker, 1996, p.11).

Churchill calls Molotov a puppet whose master is Stalin. The two leaders who lose energy and focus being drunk end their meeting in a state which encourages entropy that is indicative of the "decay" that underlie the play (Carney, 2013, p.81). Stalin suspects that a man he was told was a waiter is rubbing his face with a pencil and with his scissors he seeks to cut him out of the films.

Then Stalin expresses how he distrusts his people and Churchill is the only person he trusts. Stalin who is grasped by a feeling of consternation ponders his death and his image after his death. He poses the question to Churchill who replies that he will be honoured by his people:

STALIN: Ask Churchill, what will they do to him when he's dead?

SOV. INTERPRETER: Stalin asks, what will they do to Churchill when he is dead.

CHURCHILL: Honour me.

STALIN: There are no mirrors to Stalin. Only his portrait sycophantically done ... (*He turns.*) **Who will know me when I'm dead!** (Barker, 1996, p.14).

The use of mirrors either as stage properties (props) or as referred to in the dialogues between characters in Barker's plays, brings to the fore "the notion of refraction and plurality of vision; it suggests the multiple positionality of the gaze" (Sakellariidou, 2003, p.103). Mirrors appears in almost all the plays discussed in this research; their major function included multiplication of perspective as well as generation of consecutive gaze shifts (*Ibid.*) and even lack thereof.

The piece's subtitle is "*Moments in History and Anti-History*". Historical narratives are considered by Barker as "ideological consultations that seek to assimilate and annex the individual" (Lamb, 2005, p.66). *The Power of the Dog* socially criticises the issue which Barker no longer engaged with in his Theatre of Catastrophe (Carney, 2013, p.81). While

history is represented by Stalin, a Hungarian photographer/model represents anti-history (Lamb, 2005, p.66). Ilona collaborates not only with Nazis but also with Allies to follow her career ambitions. The encounter between history and anti-history is portrayed in the last scene when Stalin and Ilona meet.

Ilona, a former fashion model, has turned into a war photographer while she still flirts with the fashion world. She explores battlefields and takes photos of war atrocities while fashionably attired. Weeks argues, "... Ilona's face becomes as much an issue in the play as Stalin's" (2001, p.67). Representing a Brechtian figure who has survived the atrocities of the twentieth century, Ilona has lost faith in emotions and rather supports a philosophy of will which is indispensable from Barker's aesthetic:

It is fair to say that *The Power of the Dog* contains no characters, if by 'character' we mean consistent, coherent, psychologically recognizable imitations that seek to fabricate a recognizable semblance of 'the human.' [...] Barker fashions new aesthetic beings that may have no accountability to anything but their own fictionality. It is, after all, one of the tenets of tragic figures that their destinies are inherent to their beings, and that their agency is inseparable from the fates to which they succumb. This is the aspect of Barker's catastrophic characters that is self-willed [*sic*] (Carney, 2013, pp.82-83).

As Barker deemed it necessary to bring on stage the Vanya he had reconstructed, he also felt that it is obligatory to stage Stalin "during the post-structuralist moment" (Weeks, 2001, p.76).

Matrimova, a Russian infantrywoman, who is a student at the School of Film and Poetry of the University of Sverdlovsk who has joined the Motorised Division and is producing a celluloid-free film in order to fictionalise the soldiers' history. She seeks to depict the idea that "the battle sequences achieve a degree of realism never before encountered in the history

of the cinema!" (Barker, 1996, p.19); hence, rendering artificial the previous attempts at producing films in this genre.

Matrimova wishes to depict the truth as a whole not in fragments or bits. Her theory of Wholefilm promises to offer reality in its completeness. For this purpose, she intends to use three screens, representing Psychology, History and Possibility, which are in a dialectical relationship with each other. Matrimova, like Barker, believes that the audience must also assume a responsibility and abandon his/her passive role. Later on Matrimova feels the need for a fourth screen:

MATRIMOVA: [...] If the absolutely true is absolutely false, how do you – (*Pause*) - It calls for a fourth screen! A Fourth Screen which says – notwithstanding all that has been registered on screens one to three – there is always the possibility that – (*She holds her head, agonized*) [*sic*] I shall never make a film (Barker, 1996, p.55).

The fourth screen depicts the end of the carnival; true things turned false. Carney argues that if film screen number one depicts "naïve subjectivity", screen number two portrays "historical causality" and screen number three shows "the possibility for change that is the opening into the future", consequently, screen number four is:

[The] screen of the impossible yet actual, is Barker's tragedy screen, where catastrophic historical circumstances become the ground for individuals to merge their wills with historical fatality (Carney, 2013, p.86).

Despite Carney's reading of screen number four, a Bakhtinian reading of the play in the light of his theory of carnival suggests that the fourth screen depicts realities which were obscured

during the carnival. A Barkerian touch, nonetheless, needs to be added to the reading suggesting that the fourth screen pictures the post-carnival reality, subjects of the feast refuse to assume their pre-carnival role; hence, the need for the fourth scene.

Ilona – Stalin encounter becomes possible as Sorge, who has fallen in love with Ilona, kills Victor, the other photographer, and therefore asks Ilona to do the portrait/photography of Stalin. Stalin, however, had asked Poskrebyshev to bring "a little photographer" who is somewhere in the Polish desert (Barker, 1996, p.15).

Stalin warns Ilona that even taking a portrait of him can be tantamount to problems. Ilona, however, asks "Isn't it a face like any other? (Barker, 1996, p.56). The challenge which Ilona poses to Stalin foreshadows the end of the carnival. Stalin's face she argues is like everyman's face and as an individual he resembles other men with nothing to distinguish him. Ilona's statement serves as a blow to Stalin's status and drags him down from his ivory tower. The very notion of carnival's end amounts to an end of reversal of the roles – as if Stalin himself was allowed an approved transgression which has reached its end.

Weeks argues that:

Barker's response to this world is to create characters who resist absolute knowledge (for Barker, ideology) by all means available. "The unpredictability of the human soul," he says in his essays, "resistant to ideology and the tortures of logic, [becomes] a source of hope." Certainly Ilona illustrates this unpredictability [of the human soul]; she survives in part because she is unafraid of contradiction, becoming by turns compliant and steely, indulgent and withholding, passionate and skeptical, courageous and cowardly. It is not ill advised to invoke Shakespeare in describing her rich ambiguity as a dramatic character and her resistance to easy continuities (2001, p.77).

Ilona sees Stalin more like an "everyman" avoiding being intimidated by him. Despite her attempts to stay indifferent and fearless, her dropping of a few plates betrays her. Some incriminating photos which Ilona had taken and Sorge had saved makes Ilona subject to a death sentence as Stalin informs her that she will not be killed. Then, Ilona falls into Stalin's arms and kisses her.

It seems that when confronted by the empty personality of Stalin, the powerful aura of history embodied, Ilona is finally bested and falls back into a previously stifled humanity. It is possible that here she succumbs to that tragic being, that suffering of want, that Sorge so needed to draw from her for the sake of his desire. The achievement of this merging of will with suffering demands a confrontation with a terrifying, inhuman godlike being who holds her fate in his hands and who sets her entire narrative in play which his order for a photographer in the play's opening scene (Carney, 2013, p.86).

In Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe, the will required to practice one's want and desire is mingled with suffering and pain. *The Power of the Dog* is no exception though. Stalin who spares the lives of both Sorge and Ilona further offers them an opportunity to celebrate life and existence. Stalin allows them to overcome their marginalisation which is a result of his authority. Consequently, they are liberated from the established truth and fates which were not to be questioned otherwise.

Apart from the opening scene of *The Power of the Dog*, which as discussed is a full-scale incarnation of carnival, the protagonist, Joseph Stalin's prescience is only tantamount to the temporariness of the carnival.

Carnival elements emerge in the most unlikely moments of the play. Arkov, a Russian officer, mentions to Ilona and Victor that:

... My brother died in Byelorussia, my mother was murdered in Kerch. But we do not talk of private losses. How can you reconstruct if you are undermined by grief? Everyone has lost and would benefit from competition in suffering? ... (Barker, 1996, p.17).

By reconstruction, Arkov also refers to the idea of rejuvenation of life and birth after death. He also confirms the importance of death in the recreation of life. If one cannot overcome death, he/she cannot go beyond the loss and achieve what awaits him/her next. If the whole concept of carnival revolves around festivity and joyousness, in *The Power of the Dog* it has pain and cruel laughter at its heart.

Possibilities in History and Humour

The Power of the Dog depicts Barker's sense of humour in approaching history and offering the alternatives to what might be otherwise considered as authentic historical accounts. Subversion of roles, undermining truth, misplaced characters and grotesque images are some of the characteristics of this play which account for the humour and the carnivalesque in the piece.

Depicting Stalinism and the totalitarian erasure, *The Power of the Dog* urges an anti-carnavalesque reading. However, carnivalesque is the bed upon which the play is founded. McGroot, the Scottish comedian, represents the clown figure in the carnival spirit. Bakhtin argues that the degradation of highly ceremonial gestures or rituals to the material sphere is one of the attributes of the medieval clown (1984, p.20).

However, as argued in Chapter Two, David Edgar contends that artistic or theatrical carnivals render useful services on the stage. The role McGroot plays not only enhances the anti-history components of the play but also contributes to the overall spirit of subverting of

hierarchies in the meanwhile the two leaders exchange important political perspectives. Sömbül argues that McGroot represents the artist and his viewpoints are those of a sidelined figure who has been denied "a place in official historical records"; hence, his anti-historic interpretation (2018, p.167).

Barker depicts Stalin as "prescient; in the post-Stalinist era, Stalin's own image would be subject to erasure" (Weeks, 2001, p.63). Barker's Stalin is also aware that the carnival will be over one day and when it is finally over, he will be no more than an ordinary man or even lower. His moody isolation in Kremlin is juxtaposed by Barker against catastrophe and suffering prevailing on the European battlefields (Weeks, 2001, p.66).

4.2. *The Castle: Carnival nipped in the bud*

The Castle was premiered at the Royal Shakespeare Company Pit at the Barbican as part of a Barker season in 1985. A tightly integrated play, *The Castle* is characterised by a richness of text, depth of writing craft and symbolism in bringing together economy and integration (Lamb, 2005, p.94). The play remains one of the most admired pieces of Barker with a simple but symbolic plot (*Ibid.*). One of the most catastrophic plays by Barker, the performance of *The Castle* is described as entertaining despite the playwright's intention by reviewer Ben Brantley (2013).

The play opens when an English knight, Stucley, returns to his village along with his servant and a captive Arab engineer, after seven years of fighting in the Crusades to find that not only is the village neglected but also its residents have changed their lifestyles. Much to the men's surprise, the women have totally abandoned their previous life style as well as beliefs.

Stucley, the knight, is disheartened to find the church where he and Ann married is filled with animal dirt. Even more shocking, Stucley finds that his wife has changed and is no longer the object of his dreams. Stucley tells her how he kept himself pure and avoided pleasure in which other men indulged. Ann, however, remains indifferent. She tells him that he should not have dreamt of her during these seven years and must have followed his desires. Ann had relations with other men resulting in four children of whom three did not survive. She is also in love with Skinner.

In the absence of their husbands, the women of the village inclined to homosexual relationships. They only had relationships with the remaining men for the purpose of procreation. Ann advises Stucley not to stay in the village for more than a night. She suggests that he only passes through the village and continues his way; he, however, rejects the advice and says that this is home where he is determined to stay.

Stucley gets hold of the priest whom he believes has betrayed the men who went to fight at the Crusades by supporting women's cause and approving of throwing down "fences" (Barker, 1990, p.212). Stucley truly holds him accountable for the situation in the village. He, therefore, orders that the priest be locked in the church and after cleaning it restore it to the same old condition. In the meanwhile, Krak who is a captive Arab engineer suggests that they construct a castle, which "resembles a defence but is really as attack" (Barker, 1990, p.213) and will help restore order. Stucley, consequently, decides to implement the project to win back his diminished rule. Batter, who is a servant to Stucley, is sharper than his master in observing that the castle will block the view of the sky and seems more like a jail than a fortress.

Stucley's desperateness motivates him to accept the captive engineer's proposal to build a castle. Krak who is aware that he might not be released decides to reverse the roles by

becoming the captor. The construction of the castle and its fortification contribute to the role reversal, which is one of the most crucial principles of the carnivalesque. In order to overthrow the ruling system which has left him with no prospects of release, Krak draws upon his capabilities to confine Stucley's power. The more the castle is fortified, the more power Krak gains assisting him to climb up the ladder of liberation by making his masters enslaved to his construction and engineering expertise.

As the construction of the castle continues, Skinner strives to keep the women of the village from returning to their previous lifestyle. She checks on them to make sure they do not get trapped by the image of love-life which men try to portray for them. She warns them against having intercourse which according to her must be tossed off as a burden. She even catches one of the women red-handed as she seeks to have an intercourse with the builder. Skinner suspects that Ann whom she dearly loves is no longer in love with her and is distracted by the castle. She realises that Krak, the Arab architect, has come between Ann and her. She, therefore, kills the builder and is in turn incarcerated and then tried for committing murder. Stucley sentences her to be released with the decaying body of her victim chained to her.

Attaching great importance to tragedy and murder as its instrument, Barker argues that it also leads to the flourishing of creativity in a play. He explains this point in his *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre*, saying that, "tragedy makes of murder its most creative instrument, the first gesture of re-ordering that dominates the spiritual revolution of the protagonists. In this sense it is a *grace* ..." (Barker, 2005, p.61). In *The Castle*, Barker indeed takes advantage of murder in order to advance its tragedy contributing at the same time to the underlying carnivalesque at play in the piece.

Stucley's distrustfulness grows into an obsession with over-fortifying the castle. His paranoia overwhelms Ann who seduces the Arab engineer Krak; pregnant with his baby, Ann proposes

that they elope to find out that the castle is inescapable. She, consequently, stabs herself and the baby to death, which creates a trend of suicide among the pregnant women in the village. As women jump off the castle wall, soldiers shout "Raining, women!" (Barker, 1990, p.244). Nailer then suggests that:

NAILER (*rising to his feet*): They must be locked away. All women who are pregnant. Chained at wrist and ankle, like cows in the stall. They bear our future in their innards and they kill it. **By what right!** All women big about the middle, lock up! [...] (Barker, 1990, p.245).

The carnival is, nevertheless, nipped in the bud with the incidents such as mass suicide of the pregnant women. The play serves rather as a hackneyed carnival celebration. When Skinner accepts the power, which is offered to her, she requests Krak to demolish the castle. Krak, however, mentions, "Demolition needs a drawing, too" (Barker, 1990, p.249). The carnival, which started with Krak, ends in his hands as well. Pregnant women represent the grotesque body "marked by the evidence of its material origin and destiny" (Denith, 1995, p.65).

Stucley fails to win back Ann's love, finds his dreams of establishing his sect of Christianity shattered and is murdered by Batter. Nailer and Batter then try to convince Skinner to lead the church, The Holy Congregation of Wise Womb; Skinner, however, rejects the proposal only to be offered to rule the village which she accepts while regretting the time when there was no government.

This is one of the instances in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe in which at the end of the carnival-like situation, individuals conclude that the same subversive circumstances can serve as a remedy for the ailments of the post-carnival era. Even though Skinner's leadership was

dismissed as toppling the religious and marriage institutions, the priest is finally convinced, facilitated by Stucley's murder, that she is a more qualified leader.

The description, which Skinner offers of the transformation of villagers' lives carries several carnival characteristics. Ownership, religious beliefs and restrictions, masculinity and patriarchy and bodily constraints are dispensed with. They have reversed all the existing pre-ordained roles of objects and places and engaged in a cult of celebration of everything by which they were, otherwise, physically or mentally incarcerated. The women villagers have therefore “evolved a different lifestyle which is feminist, collective and non-exploitive of human or natural powers” (Lamb, 2005, p.94).

The image of Skinner with the rotting body of the builder tied to her accounts for one of the most catastrophic and grotesque images in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe as depicted in the following image:



Figure 1 *The Castle* (directed by Nick Hamm). Harriet Walter (Skinner).
Royal Shakespeare Company, 1985. Photo: Donald Cooper.

Barker describes this as "*a grotesque parody of pregnancy*" in the stage direction (Barker, 1990, p.239). For Barker, the dead body characterises as "an object of fascination both in life and in art", he further believes that a dead body's decay is mesmerising (Barker, 2005, p.54). The scene puts forward not only a grotesque image of Skinner but also a profoundly impactful picture of death and life being so mingled with one another.

As discussed in Chapter Two, carnival owes its potential to its dependence on concepts of fertility and consequently rejuvenation. Barker inflicts catastrophe upon this carnival image to symbolically portray Skinner's thwarted effort in liberating her beloved from the domination of the Builder and the villagers from the supremacy of the men who insist on the construction of the castle.

Struggling to live and to exist meet face to face with the decaying status of the dead corpse. Barker painfully pictures the burden of the dead on the shoulders of the living. Taylor argues that grotesque imagery helped the human being to defeat the sense of fear projected to them by the official imagery through the assimilation of "human with cosmic elements" (1995, p.21). Skinner succeeds in surviving the sense of fear she is sentenced to experience and is later rewarded with the opportunity to become the village's leader. In other words, the grotesque image portrayed by Skinner provokes a bitter laughter while it reminds the audience that simultaneously with its decay regenerative forces are at work to transform the condition of Skinner and human being in general. Skinner transforms from a criminal to a spiritual leader.

Declining the offer, Skinner receives an even more unexpected one to rule the territory. She refuses to accept when Krak intervenes and requests her to take the offer. Skinner eventually agrees to shoulder the responsibility despite being traumatised by the very fact that she is engaged in establishing a government. Skinner who is against all sorts of establishment ironically finds herself founding one. This development in the play heralds the end of the carnival the women of the village had commenced; however, it also proves that the carnival experience has left a huge impact on not only women but also the men in the village as they are no longer chasing Christianity and patriarchal system. They are rather after a feminist/matriarchal "Earth-mother religion".

Carnavalesque interpretation of The Castle

A carnivalesque interpretation of *The Castle* focuses primarily on the clash between the two opposing elements of the ruling power and its subjects. At the very beginning of the play,

Skinner in her description of what the women went through in the absence of their men, depicts this image:

SKINNER: First there was the bailiff, and we broke the bailiff. And then there was God, and we broke God. And lastly there was cock, and we broke that, too. Freed the ground, freed religion, freed the body. And went up this hill, standing together naked like the old female pack, growing to eat and not to market, friends to cattle who we milked but never slaughtered, joining the strips and dancing in the commons, the three days' labour that we gave instead to the hungry, turned the tithe barn into a hospital and found cunt beautiful that we had hidden and suffered shame for, its lovely shapelessness, its colour all miraculous, [...] (Barker, 1990, p.203).

Skinner's words are a manifesto of the cult of women cherishing the overthrow of political and religious hierarchies. Kershaw argues that carnival, like the counter-culture is completely anti-structuralist (1992, p.73). The women had won their way by inverting all the constraints which the rules of the everyday world had imposed on them. Therefore, the lifestyle and the rules which dominate their lives prior to the return of men is satirical parodying power.

In *The Castle*, tell-tale as its title is, landscapes and buildings play a very significant role in intensifying the working of the underlying carnival as well. The very premises of the church were turned into a hospital and later a shelter for animals. In other words, not only the characters but also the unanimated objects participate in overthrowing the traditional and religious means of asserting power. This is also manifest in the function the castle is expected to have. The castle outgrows in power over its designer and builder and claims supremacy evading its architect's control over it. It emerges as it is fortified, denying even its designer the luxury of control.

As Julia Kristeva (1986) argues "the carnivalesque structure is anti-Christian and anti-rationalist" (p.50). The anti-Christian nature of carnival is an underlying theme depicted in

the play. No matter how hard Stucley struggles to restore Christianity, he fails and is seen sacrificed for the cause. As John H. Baker argues with regard to Howard Barker's play *Rome* (1989) that "Barker seems to suggest [...] that the worship instinct, like sexual desire, is irrational, completely devoid of any moral qualities and potentially destructive" (Baker, 2012, p.35).

Kristeva further clarifies the history of the Menippean carnivalesque structure as one with a history of the fight against Christianity and its representation at the heart of which lies an exploration of the language and consequently of sexuality and death. In this light, *The Castle* features the characteristics of the Menippean carnivalesque as it not only begins with the women's hard-won fight against Christianity but also features their resistance in the face of attempts to restore it. Sexuality along with seduction, which is specifically represented by Ann, marks remarkable aspects of the piece. Throughout the play Ann either seduces or is seduced. Like other plays by Barker, death is a major theme in the play.

In Act One, Scene Four, Stucley engages in a conversation with Nailer about the Christ and his manhood. Having gone through the *Bible*, he admits to the priest that he has found no reference to Christ's genitals and it is, therefore, missing according to him. Nailer explains that the "gospels are scrupulous in their avoidance of anatomical and physiological description. We have, for example, no image of Christ's face, let alone his –" (Barker, 1990, p.221). In this scene, the conversation revolves much around lower bodily strata which is one of the major characteristics of the carnivalesque.

Moreover, parodies of recognised and respected rules and rituals constitute another crucial part of the carnival (Eco, 1984, p.6). In Act One, Scene Four, Barker depicts a parody of ordainment. Stucley who seems to be out of his senses and has lost control over his behaviour, dictates to Nailer to write in a *Bible*, what he believes is missing. He then orders

that a hat be brought for Nailer. Hush, a villager, who happens to arrive, only manages to find a tool bag which Stucley uses to crown Nailer as the bishop of the Church of the Christ the Lover as demonstrated here:

STUCLEY: Yes – Yes! Place it on him, crown him! (NAILER *looks uncomfortable*. HUSH *puts the bag on NAILER's head*.) Oh, yes, oh, look at that! The dignity, the patter, and the aged mush! All creases, not of wisdom, but repented filth, but who knows that? I'd think to look at him, oh, terrible, hours in the celibate cell! **Don't tell me I can't ordain you**, that is taking your new enthusiasm to excess, I ordain you, I ordain you, first among episcopates of Christ the Lover, I ordain you, I ordain you, etcetera, [...] (Barker, 1990, p.224).

After repeated hassling by Stucley, Nailer succumbs to his will and considers himself guilty for the current situation in the village. Later in the scene, Ann sees Nailer and questions him about what he is busy with as she finds his appearance strange and funny. She advises him to find a mirror and look at himself. He says to Ann, "All Symbols can be ridiculed" (Barker, 1990, p.226), and then mentions that he does not to look at himself in a mirror. He explains to Ann that what he is wearing is a mitre; she, however, does not understand and is not convinced by his explanation. Nailer leaves the scene. This scene is, nonetheless, one of the most brilliant scenes in the play which vividly depicts the carnival aspects of Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe.

Another brilliant scene in the piece is Act Two, Scene Three when Skinner appears on the stage with the rotting body of Holiday chained to her. Barker dramatically portrays the "grotesque parody of pregnancy" which enhances the overall carnivalesque characteristic of the play. Skinner is not in fond of the female organ sharing no sympathy for it and considering sexual intercourse as a burden. Ironically, she is doomed to carry her victim parodying pregnancy complaining about the morning sickness which lingers with her all day

long and constantly feeling the butt of the corpse's male organ against hers (Barker, 1990, p.239). Alireza Fakhrekondeh (2019) argues that:

This quasi-pregnancy has altered her “gravity” and operates on two levels. First, on an anatomo-political level it exerts a normalizing and regulatory force which attaches her body to the phallogocentric discourse (and its analogue: the castle), over-inscribes it, conjugates with her body and re-verbalizes it, thereby re-shaping her embodied ethos. On an existential level, it re-configures psycho-somatic schemas rendering her more monolithic and foreclosed, though surprisingly less authoritarian [*sic*] (p.121).

Skinner loses many privileges upon the arrival of men; she loses her rule over the village, she loses her beloved Ann, loses her witchcraft and is finally sentenced to a most disgusting form of punishment. She, however, is reluctant to leave the village despite the fact that she is stoned when she appears in public. The more the corpse decays, the more the status of Stucley as the ruler deteriorates. She accepts the pain with open arms; goes through it and internalises the pain which eventually leads to the salvation of the village and her.

As discussed in Chapter Two, Bakhtin believes that abstractisation of the grotesque manipulates the nature of the grotesque image because it forces the grotesque to gravitate toward a "moral" meaning. In line with this, exaggeration turns to a powerful caricature, which can become too independent of the author and can even move in an opposite direction.

The idea of constructing a castle stemmed from a moral thinking that later acquired amoral properties. As a result, the castle serves as the incarnation of an exaggerated manner of thinking the grotesque aspects of which continue to outweigh the purpose it was meant to serve. At this stage, the castle becomes too independent and forceful to succumb to the function it was initially supposed to serve and; therefore, asserts control over its constructors. Skinner and the women of the village had developed a psychological awareness which led

them to subvert the patriarchal system which had enslaved them. Yet Rabey contextualises Barker's *The Castle* in the bigger picture of post-9/11 global politics and mentions that *The Castle* is one of Barker's plays which predicts the aspects of the politics of this era and the reflections on the war on terror (2006, p.19).

The carnival at play in this piece transforms unjustified relationships and sanctions profanity. This included legal, religious and social relationships. The church is turned into a hospital as it is believed to be of more use and good to the people of the village. Pragmatism accounts for an indispensable element of this play. The new order, which the men wish to impose on the village, indicates an end to the carnival as they require a ruling system to be established and a religion to be restored. Even though the leader would be a lady and the religion would be a nature-oriented one, the very fact that such social and religious institutions are to be re-installed depicts the transitoriness of the carnival. Consequently, it re-enforces doubts cast on the nature of carnival and its much disputed liberating qualities.

Overcoming Barriers in Form and Content

The Castle marks a remarkable shift in Barker's formation of his new theatre. Carnavalesque and tragedy are mingled in a more sophisticated manner to celebrate the catastrophe and the experience thereof. Barker's humour becomes even more savage and the grotesque images which he portrays turn more violent and disturbing.

Through their journey to discover truth by the means of all hardships, Barker's protagonists encounter and explore hidden aspects of their unconscious and subjectivity, which leads to the creation of new forms. The inclination towards experimental consideration of the forbidden can lead to a reversal of roles and of situations, which in the end leads to the carnivalesque.

4.3. *The Europeans*: Staging (anti-)History

Similar to *The Power of the Dog*, *The Europeans* is also a play which excavates "a startlingly re-visioned history which challenged conventional obedience to the moralities of documentary and theatrical realism" (Rabey, 2006, p.14). Catastrophic situations, escaping from history and tragedy through catharsis mark Barker's piece, *The Europeans*. Characters' responses to their catastrophic situations and to losing their moorings shape the nucleus of the play. This "unanchoring of self" which happens in *The Europeans* provokes different reactions including through the aesthetic, "hyperbolic performativity of self" and "an embracing of their pain and loss as a resistance to a conciliatory and victorious social environment" (Carney, 2013, p.98).

The Europeans is loosely based on historical facts about Vienna's siege by Turks in 1684. The Turks are repulsed from Europe thanks to the courageous military commander Starhemberg who refuses the honours the Emperor and the court seeks to extend to him and prefers to live a peaceful ordinary life filled with love. In his quest for love, Starhemberg falls in love with Katrin who was raped by some Turks who amputated her breasts and impregnated her. Barker asserts in an interview with Rabey published in *Theatre of Catastrophe* (2006) that:

Fear of sickness and death is obsessive here, and the state in its medicalisation of all human experience makes itself a body-snatching agency in the process. Organ removal, an extreme form of the impertinence of the *demos* and the eradication of the private, is justified only by dread of death. But I think of anxiety in my theatre as a state quite different to fear ... rather it is a troubling of the fixed strata of moral conventions ... a sort of low quaking that threatens the foundations of the stable personality ... the public doesn't quite know where to place its feet, there is an insecurity, but one which is simultaneously exhilarating – surely the best example is the shock and freedom lent to Katrin by the fall of the social system in *The Europeans*. I think of these plays as types of prayer, they demand something of a world which won't give it, but one does

not cease praying ... Isn't one anxious when one prays? Tragedy originates from these same sources (Barker, 2006, pp.33-34).

The Europeans engages an amalgam of anxiety, pain and grotesque to portray impossible moments which are much desired. Like the carnival which temporarily realises the desires of the public, Barker explains that his plays compare to prayer which are strong in desire and lack the assuredness to make them happen.

In Scene Two, Act One, Katrin offers an account of the rape scene cutting her throat and her breasts. Katrin's passion of language makes her put words together meticulously to voice the pain and atrocity she was inflicted with. Katrin utilises the capacity of language to re-shape her mind and thoughts and to recreate another image of herself to survive her traumatic pain. Bakhtin regarded highly:

the endless multiplicity and richness of actual speech, of dialect and idiolect, of slang and swearing, of court and country, of past and present, of both literature and life, all subject to the overchanging context of society and history from the slogan of the day to the expression of an epoch (Knowles, 1998, p.4).

Carney, nonetheless, contends that Katrin finds herself in a situation wherein she is struggling with the language and words. He mentions that words turn into barriers, which Katrin has to overcome to recount her story. She, however, notices that she is solely uttering euphemism with the language turning into an obstacle which obstructs her open communication of the incident (2013, p.98). Rabey further explicates, "Barker imbues his characters with articulacy and a fluency which is fully and poetically expressive, rather than concerned with the reproduction of contemporary everyday speech" (Rabey, 2009, p.10).

Lamb, however, describes this speech as "one of the most striking feature of Barker's dramaturgy" (2005, p70). He maintains that through Katrin's speech, Barker proves his skill at composing texts which sensitively reflect the wavering of a consciousness that strives strenuously to "cope in extremity" (*Ibid.*). Finally, Katrin's consciousness of the rape, of language and of the quite Other who is transcribing her narrative leads to a flickering of her identity (*Ibid.*, p.71).

Barker is comparable to Shakespeare in the sense that characters' exploration of "extreme situations brings them into collision with 'the limits of language ...'" (Rabey, 2009, p.9). Drawing on techniques such as "short, staccato sentences, the repetition, the ostentatious alliteration, the metonymy, the inversion of conventional syntax, the juxtaposition of 'heightened' and idiomatic speech" Barker creates a vehemently intense linguistic self-consciousness (Shaughnessy, 1989, p.266). Leopold the mocking emperor never takes a serious stance towards the incidents and developments. It does not matter if he visits a battlefield with dead people on the ground or the childbirth scene he always laughs.

Re-creation and reconciliation are two of the most important themes, which occur in *The Europeans* along with the carnival theme, which is depicted most vehemently. The war-torn country as well as the European territory is in need of reconstruction. Leopold, the emperor, relies on his only hope, Starhemberg, for performing the task. He, however, is too weary to accept the assignment. His knowledge of the termination of the carnival makes him encounter the reality of his life as shown in this brief exchange of words with Starhemberg:

LEOPOLD: [...] Someone is writing his biography, but he will give no evidence. And the city architect has sculpted him for Starhemberg Square, but without a face! It is ridiculous, when can he do the face?

STARHEMBERG: Let it have no face.

LEOPOLD: **I laugh. I laugh** (Barker, 1996, p.75).

The text of the play avoids revealing the secret behind "the recurrent public proclamation of laughter"; moreover, Barker provides no stage directions requiring that Leopold should laugh (Barnett, 2007, p.467).

The very grotesque image Starhemberg envisages of him leaves the project of making his sculpture for Starhemberg Square unfinished like the grotesque body and its unfinished characteristic. Like the treatment of the grotesque in Romanticism in the sense that it is associated with the negative and the dark, the grotesque in the Theatre of Catastrophe has the same negative and dark qualities. Even though Barker admits the liberating quality of laughter (1997, p.52), he does not trust it as much as he trusts laughter's oppressiveness. Hence, Barker advocates a crueller laughter rather than a gay joyous one, which can at least break the oppressive effect of such a technique in his socio-political climate. When the mask of heroism he was wearing during the carnival falls off, Starhemberg who is in a quest for a new self bears the knowledge that his former identity, that is, the carnival identity, will not serve him right in the new or the post-carnival era.

When Leopold encourages Starhemberg to be "a mirror in which we dwarfs may see the possibility of godlike self" (Barker, 1996, p.75), he makes a carnivalistic utterance, which affirms the role-reversal taking place in the piece. Leopold, the king, degrades his own position to elevate Starhemberg's position albeit sarcastically. Leopold fails to observe that the mirror he is referring to is "the shattered mirror of the ego, cracked by loss and trauma" (Carney, 2013, p.99).

Reconciliation as a concept, which Barker loathes, makes its way to this play as one of the key concepts. Katrin who is pregnant because of the rape carries a baby with half-Turkish blood. In order to create a Europe, which features harmony, Starhemberg gives the child to

Jemal Pasha, a Turkish commander, who is initially reluctant to accept the child. Leopold calls the baby girl "Concilia" whom is doomed to be used as a means of reconciling with the enemy. Like her mother who becomes a victim of history:

STARHEMBERG: Birth's a thing of beauty, surely?

MIDWIFE: It's a thing of pain.

STARHEMBERG: Yes, but pain's divisible.

MIDWIFE: It divided me. I thought I'd never come together again. (Barker, 1996, p.101)

This dialogue between Starhemberg and the Midwife skilfully portrays the interwoven importance of beauty, pain and regeneration. The interplay of these concepts constructs the core of Barker's use of the carnivalesque. The desire for beauty entails pain which otherwise is "divisible"; however, pain can be translated into regeneration. The road from beauty to regeneration is paved by pain and agony. In an interview with Rabey and Gritzner, Barker argues that "if you cannot relate pain to beauty, I think you are not a European in your soul" (2006, p.37). Barker holds that the Europeans "have argued beauty to an extreme" by making beauty dominate the pain-stricken streets of old cities (*Ibid.*).

Apart from the conception of reconciliation, Katrin detests domesticity as an idea to further suppress the flourishing of individual specifics. Under such circumstances grief remains as the only tool which Katrin can cling to in order to preserve her particular personality; she explains:

KATRIN: **Don't call me silly in that way you do.** (*Pause*) I can't go home because – and do listen, this will be difficult for you, perhaps beyond your grasp – home is the instrument of reconciliation, the means through which all crime is rinsed in streams of sympathy and outrage doused, and blame is swallowed in

upholstery, home is the suffocator of all temper, the place where the preposterous becomes the tolerable and hell itself is stacked on shelves, I wish to hold on to my agony, it's all I have (Pause) (Barker, 1996, p.70).

These two excerpts from the play depict the predominance of the concept of reconciliation in *The Europeans*. Both Katrin and Starhemberg struggle against reconciliation simultaneously with their struggles to love. However, reconciliation in this case translates into "the recontainment of individual loss and suffering within grand narratives of History". Consequently, the characters strive to create the Theatre of Catastrophe "out of their alienation and pain as a means of escaping History" (Carney, 2013, p.96).

Starhemberg's thoughts about birth and pain represent Howard Barker's notion of pain and becoming. Barker explains that:

[...] Katrin's atrocious condition is a spur to desire in Starhemberg, her eroticism lying precisely in her impossible –to – assimilate history. She has none of the functions of fertility, being unable to feed an infant. By loving Katrin, Starhemberg publicly breaks the silent contract of socialized love [*sic*] (Barker, 1997, p.195).

The depiction of Katrin's flawed woman/motherhood is conducive to a hackneyed carnival celebration of birth and fertility. The emphasis on her grotesque body which breaks the cycle of life and growth also takes the concept of a man's love for her to another level which is more indicative of the disrupted functions of an accepted approach to life.

Barker describes his drama as "compellingly imaginative and without responsibility to historical or political convention" (1997, p.29). Barker's statement applies to *The Europeans* and *The Power of the Dog* in the sense that they both lack responsibility to historical as well

as political standards. Moreover, as described above, Barker's theatre shoulders no responsibility to well-established life styles and their requirements.

One of the play's most carnival images is depicted in Scene Three, Act I, when the painter tells Leopold that:

PAINTER: I think by discarding the formality of monarchy, you think you disrupt criticism, and by playing the fool, disarm any who would dare call you so, and thereby flatter your intelligence. I hope I am not offending you. (Barker, 1996, p.73)

The painter argues that Leopold is providing a licensed space for people under his reign to transgress the rules and consequently to save himself from criticism. The painter, however, warns Leopold, the emperor, that his plan will merely lead to a worse state of affairs. By asking the painter to call this painting "He Comes Back to Vienna", Leopold is implying that the carnival is now over emphasising that Starhemberg is aware of the emperor's cunningness. At the same time, Leopold understands that his authorised unruliness is reaching its end.

In Scene Four, Katrin has volunteered for an examination by physicians in an institute of science. Katrin allows drawings to be made of her disfigured body; she would like her face to be also painted and then ten thousand copies to be printed and distributed. She desires her child delivery to take place in the main square with spectators watching. Starhemberg asks Katrin to allow him into his life by fathering her child. Katrin, however, explains to him that the child cannot survive because she cannot feed her.

In a cellar in Vienna, Starhemberg who is searching for "education" meets with a few outcasts one of whom describes him as "a punctured snob who spunks from squalor – " (Barker, 1996, p.86). One of the women beggars warns him to stay away from them and let them be who they are and he be vicious as he is. Carney believes that Starhemberg's loss of faith results in his "comical confrontation" with outcast beggars (2013, p.98). His interpretation of the beggars' reaction to Starhemberg's exaggeration of his detachment from human being confirms the affiliation of comedy to the lower classes. He contends that beggars as representatives of lower classes avoid the action and remain passive spectators to Starhemberg's excruciation.

Katrin craves for knowledge to recreate herself. Her experiments with language also aim at satisfying her need for self-re-invention. She therefore deems the notion of giving birth to a child as the child's cry for existing. The need to exist and renovate one's existence remains paramount for Katrin. She believes that it is not necessarily the parents' desire which brings the child into the world but the very unconceived child's urge to be born. Barker strongly believes the power of the unborn in forcing itself upon the existing and living.

Lamb states that the title of the category is both ambiguous and apposite in the sense that the language which is deployed as a vital tool by Barker's characters to seduce others evades whatever controlling acts which characters/individuals seek to take to harness its power (Lamb, 2005, pp.68-69).

Katrin's recounting of her rape accounts for one of the most astonishing characteristics of Barker's theatre taking into account his emphasis on the language as the most reliable tool at the service of his carrier. Lamb believes that Barker employs language/languages which serve to seduce and to be seduced. Katrin's irrational narrative which is informed and enriched with different levels of consciousness is best explained as "baffled, deflected, and seduced"

(Lamb, 2005, p.71). Her consciousness of the rape, of language and finally her consciousness of "the silent other" is characterised by a flickering of Katrin's sense of identity which accounts for seductiveness of her narrative (*Ibid.*). In this research, Barker's sophisticated use of language is tied to the creation of the carnival effect. In like manner, articulacy is discussed as one of the major means of forming a carnival atmosphere in the research under way.

Pain, knowledge and procreation are conducive to the liberation of the "unborn self" whether it is the revitalisation of one's self or the very act of procreation and childbirth. Re-birth, becoming and being shape the most vital elements in human struggles, as proffered in Starhemberg's views on art:

STARHEMBERG: When I need. And what there will be. I need an art which will recall pain. The art that will be will be all flourishes and celebration. I need an art that will plummet through the floor of consciousness and free the unborn self. The art that will be will be extravagant and dazzling. I need an art that will shatter the mirrors. I want to make a new man and new woman but only from pieces of the old. The new man and new woman will insist on their utter novelty. I ask a lot. The new art will ask nothing [*sic*] (Barker, 1996, p.100).

Starhemberg articulates Barker's thoughts on art. For Barker art must not project what exists like a mirror, which reflects reality. Art must depict what might be. The un-lived life must be the precious product of artist effort. Carney contends that this "is conflict that Barker's art itself confronts: an art of pain in a time when society seeks to celebrate" (2013, p.97). Therefore, the unborn self whom Starhemberg refers to is "a new person constructed out of the fragments shattered by the moment of catastrophe. The unborn self is the patchwork self" rather than a "quasi-fascistic vision of the new man" (*Ibid.*):

STARHEMBERG: Birth's a thing of beauty, surely?

MIDWIFE: It's a thing of pain.

STARHEMBERG: Yes, but pain's divisible.

MIDWIFE: It divided me. I thought I'd never come together again.

STARHEMBERG (*turning away*): Oh, choke on your wit, I'm sorry I bothered you. (ORPHULS *appears*.) **Humour! Humour!** They creep among jokes like the lonely sentry in fortifications! I say pain's divisible. There's pain for something and pain for nothing, so birth's tolerable and torture's sheer disintegration, surely? (*He looks at him.*) I am thinner than yesterday, and you are even fatter (Barker, 1996, p.101).

Katrin makes an effort to offer a spectacle through the public set-up for her child delivery. She is, however, disheartened by the number of the spectators. She requests the midwife not to help her with the delivery. The spectacle continues despite the rain. Leopold who does not have the heart to observe Katrin's pain requests that somebody helps her only to encounter Starhemberg's threat that he will "burst the spleen of anyone who nears her bed" (Barker, 1996, p.103). Both Starhemberg and Katrin cherish pain and believe that Katrin needs her pain for her transformation. She finally gives birth to a baby whom Leopold christens as Concilia hoping to let history mend what it had destroyed (Barker, 1996, p.103). Rabey argues that Barker's demand of his performers to disclose themselves through stage nudity aims at questioning "conventional terms of closure associated with representative impersonation, thus problematising the categories and definitions of fiction, artifice, naturalness and performance" (2003, p.76). Amanda Price compares "Katrin's attempts to expose her body as an historical event" to Howard Barker's strivings in the 1980s to "articulate his texts as the gaping wounds of a society rather than the healing balm of ideological reconciliation" (1998, 646).

The concept of birth is impregnated with a meaningful ambivalence in the context of European expressionism "at the end of the nineteenth century and around the First World

War". This ambivalence arises in both the conception of birth as coming into existence or "as a repetition, a re-birth, a liberation of a repressed, more authentic aspect of the self that society has prohibited" (Carney, 2013, p.97). Katrin, nevertheless, feels betrayed and tells Starhemberg:

KATRIN: They cheated me ...

STARHEMBERG: Yes.

KATRIN: And made of my horrors reconciliation.

STARHEMBERG: Yes.

KATRIN: **History they made of me.**

STARHEMBERG: Yes, but we will deny them yet ...

KATRIN (*with a wail*): How ...? How ...? ... (Barker, 1996, p.104).

The conversation between the two foreshadows the decision Starhemberg takes in the final scene. Orphuls, the priest, who murders his mother, is finally murdered by Leopold's people for the crime. In Scene Four, Starhemberg is informed that Jemal Pasha and his lancers are close. He asks Katrin to bring Concilia because it is the time for them to love. Jemal is at first reluctant to accept Concilia as a gift but Starhemberg threatens him that he will kill him and the officer he has taken as hostage.

Bergson argues that he does not intend to imprison "the comic spirit within a definition" as he regards it as a "living thing". Despite the triviality of the comic spirit as supposed by Bergson, he intends to treat it "with the respect due to life" (1911, p.2). For Bergson, therefore, comedy is a matter of life and the laughter he argues for is laughter resulted from the comedy of life. The comic spirit grows and transforms gradually until it reaches "the strangest metamorphosis" (1911, p.2).

The same metamorphosis of the comic spirit also happens in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. The comic spirit, which exists, goes through transformation in a bed of pain and catastrophe

to rejuvenate the life of its characters. The stage direction at the end of *The Europeans* depicts Katrin and Starhemberg kissing as they embrace. The comic spirit, which lived in the dark corners of the play eventually, transformed into a moment of love between the two.

One of the major aspects of Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe is the "re-birth of the self in catastrophe" (Carney, 2013, p.96). Catastrophe does to the self the same thing fire does to a phoenix. Re-birth is comic and tragic, juvenile and catastrophic. It leads to a new style in Barker's work which gains existence through the carnivalisation of catastrophe.

Howard Barker argues that the laughter, which emerges from his works, is a laughter of disbelief for the reason that it is provoked at a moment of "becoming" which features many contradictions. At the face of the contradictions, the humour also leads to disbelief in addition to laughter (Barker, 1997, pp.33-34). This is well represented in Leopold's laughter of disbelief when he realises that Starhemberg has given Concilia to Jemal Pasha.

LEOPOLD. Con – cil – ia!

Con – cil – ia! (*Lights rise and fall. KATRIN walks unsteadily to STARHEMBERG. They embrace. They kiss.*)

I laugh!

I laugh! (Barker, 1996, p.116).

In spite of the cruel laughter that Barker favours, Bakhtin attributes to the carnival laughter a positive regenerating power. Despite Bakhtin's observations that laughter cannot be forced to serve "the purposes of dogmatic intolerance and violence", laughter was, for example, used in committing religious murders in the sixteenth century France. Therefore, carnival may not have resulted in violence, but grounds have been prepared by laughter for committing acts of violence (Denith, 1995, p.72).

In view of the above, having attributions such as liberating suppressed energies, does not necessarily bar the carnival from leading to cruelty, Howard Barker who is against the escapism which comedy offers also contends that the laughter provoked in his work is one out of contempt. Nevertheless, as propounded by Bakhtin, laughter performs a complementary role in the sense that it purifies and completes seriousness. Leopold's disturbing laughter is "unusual and highly theatricalized form of laughter" [*sic*] (Carney, 2013, p.102). Leopold's reaction to every situation is laughing. Regardless of the incident and the catastrophic weight it carries he not only laughs at all times but also declares it openly. Leopold's laughter indicates the insecurity that everybody is experiencing at this stage of history:

Internalizing within himself both monarch and court jester, Leopold embodies that Dionysian attitude towards the tragic that affirms, with a kind of theatricalized laughter, everything in existence. If in its energy and force this laughter and his flamboyant behaviour seem like a false mask, perhaps we should assert that while it may be a mask, it is not false, since there is no truth to be hidden or revealed by it [*sic*] (Carney, 2013, p.102).

Both *The Europeans* and *The Power of the Dog* are set in crucial moments in history but as the pieces go forward the plot is degraded to address issues of lower bodily strata among other things. In *The Power of the Dog*, Stalin's moments with Ilona and in *The Europeans*, Starhemberg's quest for an ordinary life with Katrin are indicative of the acceptance of the fact that the carnival has reached its end. The kings of the festivities must now embrace the lives, which expect them as common people in the society.

Barker describes the major distinguishing factor of the Theatre of Catastrophe as follows:

Tragedy is the greatest art form of all. It gives us the courage to continue with our life by exposing us to the pain of life. It is unsentimental, it takes us seriously as human beings, it is not condescending. Paradoxically, by seeing pain we are made greater, it becomes a need. There is nothing 'pessimistic' about this. Tragedy doesn't understand pessimism, it's a critic's word. Tragedy tells us what the world is - it doesn't explain the world. My own tragedies have no moral meaning whatsoever. They are called catastrophic because a breakdown of order - social or personal - is always the starting point, and the protagonist must invent himself out of the ruins of a life. Often this journey leads to a bitter solitude. But so what? Theatre isn't a massage. We ask it to take us seriously (Barker, 2004).

This is while the realm of comedy is rich with authorised transgression and violation of rules leaving no space for criticism Charles Lamb argues with regard to the concept of abjection in Barker's theatre that:

There are numerous other examples of Barker's interest in the state of abjection. In *The Bite of the Night*, there is the 'public marriage bed rite' of Savage in his reconstituted marriage with Creusa; in *The Europeans*, there is Katrin's insistent publicising of her rape, which culminates in the attempted public exhibition of her childbirth. Through being taken in by their own illusion, fooling others in order to fool themselves, Barker's characters regularly refuse conventional shame, thereby reversing the normal interpersonal dynamics of the situation (2005, p.76).

The two above-mentioned quotes by Barker and Lamb might seem contradictory upon first reading; however, a closer consideration of them reveals that while Barker insists on pain and catastrophe in order to make us greater, moments of abjection, humour and "fooling" are indivisible from the catastrophic journey his characters go through. Barker, consequently, does not explain the journey to the audience but rather takes them through it step by step.

Starhemberg has been cherished as a hero of the siege (Thielman, 2009 and Carney, 2013, p.97) and an alienated dissident (Carney, 2013, p.97) while Katrin has been compared to a

martyr (Thielman, 2009). Either as a hero or dissident distrusting "the triumphalist spirit of the times" (Carney, 2013, p.97), Starhemberg is more selfless than Katrin as a martyr. Starhemberg has lost faith in fellow human beings because of the extensive violations of the European values during the siege of Vienna.

Besides the grotesque realism which is the most prevalent carnival characteristic of the Theatre of Catastrophe, the overturning of the Christian faith on the part of Orphuls shapes another crucial carnival moment in this piece:

The repetitive subversion of Christian imagery in the play is both contradictory and meaningful: any attempt to envisage what it would mean to create a new human being at the physic level will be forced to confront the fact that the only vocabulary upon which one can draw contains the language and concepts that carry the baggage of the old human. And so while the fragments of the old are necessary to conceive of the new, those fragments will risk the possibility that the new human seems like a repetition of the old. The Nietzschean idea of an Anarchist, for example, describes a figure who will, Dionysus-like, reverse the Christian reversal of values, affirming life rather than negating existence. Yet the very imagery of an Anarchist remains burdened with Christian negativity, down to the very idea of a negation of Christ (Carney, 2013, p.101).

As discussed in earlier chapters, carnival feasts were rooted in the Church as religious festivities. However, these celebrations offered a break from the rigid religious rituals and practices but not their total abandonment. In *The Europeans*, Orphuls does not abandon his faith in Christianity but rather considers himself as Christ while he is serving Mass. Orphuls is obsessed with the notion of the possibilities individuals have for becoming new persons. "Other self. Other self unborn, Wrist inside my wrist. Lung inside my lung" (Barker, 1996, p.83). He further laments the prospect of his death and its injustice to his unlived life as a new person.

Discovering the death of Starhemberg's mother, Orphuls murders his own mother who found her life burdensome. He revels in the act of murder and expresses that "her death meant much to me" (Barker, 1996, p.107). When Leopold wonders how he should have felt if he had also murdered his mother, Orphuls replies that he should have felt excessively alive. He compares matricide to a "second birth, [which] like the first, induces such a rush of air to unopened lungs" (Barker, 1996, p.107). Orphuls learns that the entropy which exists around his mother's life and consequently around the morality which she practices, is only conducive to shaping more passive individuals whose deaths serve people around them better than their being alive. He is highly aware of the piling up of the energies that need to be otherwise liberated. Orphuls, therefore, describes the agony of people's lives and the evil as follows:

[...] Is there evil except not to do? I do not blaspheme when I say the gift of life is paltry and our best service to God is not to thank Him, endless thanking, no, but to enhance His offer, and yet you do not, I think if I were God I would declare with some weariness or even vehemence, how little they do with the breath I gave them, they exhale repetitions, they applaud the lie, they sleep even in their waking hours, why did I make them thus, I erred in some respect, they fill me with disgust, have you no notion of God's horror?" (Barker, 1996, pp.107-108).

As such, once again the Barkerian cult of comedy and laughter overshadow the tragedy he wishes to put his audience through. The pain which characters suffer from leads to their transformation which makes better persons of them out of the shattered pieces of their former being in a backdrop of catastrophic moments they live.

Barker puts the greatest emphasis on carnivalesque spaces, events and people in *The Europeans*. These elements lead to stronger humour in this play simultaneously verging on both the carnivalesque and the catastrophe.

Barker argues that the culmination of efforts by the writer, director and actor in the Theatre of Catastrophe is marked by a state of loss which depicts "a state of lost morality, an ethical vacuum, a denial, a rebuke to order, a melancholy and a pain" (1997, p.116). The very explanation, which Barker offers regarding his theory of catastrophe, can be also interpreted to accommodate a carnival reading of his theatre. The above-mentioned keywords used by Barker established his Theatre of Catastrophe as the carnivalesque too.

On the Verge of Carnivalising Catastrophe

It is my primary view that *The Europeans* is one of the major plays of the Theatre of Catastrophe where catastrophic events occur on several occasions. Rape, murder, siege, amputation and other acts of catastrophe happen in the course of the play rendering it an appropriate one for analyses from different vantage points. In this specific piece, however, Barker portrays what I have termed carnivalisation of catastrophe through his reliance on measures peculiar to a carnival; however, he has customised them to serve the purposes of his catastrophism.

4.4. The Comedy of Life: *Uncle Vanya* and (*Uncle*) *Vanya*

Chekhov's Uncle Vanya

A concise account of Chekhov's play assists with the contextualisation of Barker's play. Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, "Scenes from Country Life in Four Acts," is based on one of his earlier works titled, *The Wood Demon* (1889). In this play, Chekhov's contemplations

depict Russian provincial life in the 1880s (Whyman, 2011, p.98). Accordingly, *Uncle Vanya* expands / continues on this very theme. (START)

At the outset of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, the arrival of the Professor and his beautiful young wife heralds adding new blood to the country life which is on the contrary thwarted by early complains by Marina of how their routine is unnecessarily disrupted.

Uncle Vanya's Act One opens in the estate of Professor Serebryakov which was left for him by his demised first wife. The retired literature Professor is visiting the estate accompanied by his much younger and stunning second wife Yelena. Ivan Voynitsky, the Professor's brother-in-law, and his daughter Sonya, run the estate together, claim a very little amount of the overall income of the estate and send the remaining to the Professor to support his urban lifestyle.

As the play begins, the estate residents and visitors join each other for tea. Vanya and the old nurse Marina start complaining about how their routine life is disrupted by this visit, which also sparks much tension in the household later in the play. Mikhail Lvovich Astrov, a medical doctor, regrets the death of a patient while under chloroform and complains of his hard life. Ivan Petrovich Voinitsky (Vanya), on the one hand, has fallen victim to the love of the twenty-seven-year old Yelena Andreyevna, the professor's second wife, and on the other hand, abhors Serebryakov. Yelena not only provokes Vanya and Astrov to her love but also leads Vanya to recognize his hatred for Serebryakov and causes Sonya to remember her love for the doctor who has been visiting them seldom before the arrival of their visitors.

Being exposed to the Professor's vacuity and vanity, Vanya regrets the life he has sacrificed serving him both financially and in his researches which have been lately proven trivial and worthless. Vanya is aware that Serebryakov's so-called achievements in his career have been possible at the expense of his life-long sacrifice for him. He regrets that "If I had led a normal

life, I might have been a Schopenhauer, a Dostoevsky ..." (Chekhov, 2005, p.150). In this statement by Vanya, Chekhov successfully amalgamates "despair and slapstick humour". In milder words, it is strange that Chekhov should choose Dostoevsky "as an example of someone who loved 'a normal life'" (Morson, 1995, p.61). The Professor's chance with the women in his life irritates Ivan Voynitsky who strives to seduce Yelena to no avail.

Act Two begins at night; as if the night has spelled the estate and its residents. Even though Serebryakov is suffering from excruciating pain, he avoids examination by Astrov who has taken the journey upon Sonya's request despite the storm to visit him. The drunken Vanya tries his chance with Yelena who lets him down and leaves him in even greater despair. Sonya opens her heart to Yelena, with whom she had an uneasy relationship, and professes her love for Astrov to her and complains of her ugliness. Yelena also confesses to Sonya that she used to love her father but she does not love him any longer and promises that she will talk to Astrov in order to find out whether he also loves Sonya. Content with the settlement of their issues, Yelena suggests to play the piano in order to celebrate; however, Serebryakov turns down Sonya's request for permission.

The country life is so doomed that the residents themselves nip in the bud even the most basic celebration or joy. Reunions and gatherings do not convey the essence of joy and dynamism. They are designed to widen the emotional gap that exists among the estate residents despite the boisterousness that Yelena has brought about in Vanya and Astrov on the one hand and in Sonya with her love for the latter on the other hand.

Chekhov's characters are lonely beings that live in the past and are concerned about the future. They hang in somewhere between "the memories of the past and dreams of the future" (Lamb, 2013, p.88). Chekhov's juxtaposition of individual attitude serves to shed light on "an

incongruous situation in its entirety", which makes his impact as a comic artist ardent (Styan, 2006, p.89).

Act Three opens while Vanya, Sonya and Yelena sitting in the drawing room at a quarter to one waiting for the professor to join them to make an announcement, which, according to Yelena, is about business. Vanya keeps on using his sarcastic language against the professor until Sonya begs him to stop. Vanya who has annoyed Yelena once again apologises to her and as a sign of peace-making goes to fetch autumn roses he had picked for her. After Vanya leaves, Sonya finds the opportunity to admit to Yelena how she feels she is ugly. She complains that the doctor who seldom visited them has now abandoned his forestry and medical practice to visit them only for the sake of his love for Yelena.

Sonya then declares to Helena her six-year-long love for the doctor to which he has only turned a blind eye. To save Sonya of the agony of uncertainty, Yelena proposes to hint the issue to the doctor to find out his feelings for her. On the one hand, undoubtedly, Yelena is in love with the doctor whom he finds charming and, on the other hand, feels guilty about it. Therefore, the doctor enters the room to show Yelena his sketches and starts passionately briefing her on the process of deforestation in the past twenty-five years. Yelena listens but tells him that he does not understand and her mind is elsewhere. Then she asks Astrov to sit to inquire him about Sonya and if he has noticed anything about her, which he rejects, and, in return, admits his love for Yelena and kisses her.

Vanya enters carrying the flowers and tells them that he saw the moment. Yelena begs him to help them leave the estate immediately. Serebryakov along with Telegin, Maryna and Sonya enters the drawing room. Maria Vasilyevna Voynitsky then joins the company and the professor proceeds to announce that he intends to sell the estate to invest in bonds and to buy a village cottage in Finland. At this stage, Vanya who is left with the shattered dream of

winning Yelena's heart receives the mortal blow of also losing the estate, which actually belongs to his niece. At the climactic point, when Vanya is outraged at the Professor's announcement, he adopts a destructive attitude, which is common to some of Chekhov's characters (Whyman, 2011, p.27), takes his gun, and attempts to shoot the Professor to no avail. Despaired and disappointed, Vanya sinks in a chair.

Styan argues that:

[...] the detachment of the audience is wonderfully secured when Vanya fires at the Professor and misses: the anticlimax of this incident in the third act, with the great man cowering in fear and the middle-aged rebel throwing a tantrum and casting aside his weapon in disgust, is irreducible by any comic evaluation (2006, p.90).

Styan consequently is arguing that the bitter aftertaste of Chekhov's drama must not obscure neither the comic effect nor the struggle to stay objective. This approach by Chekhov is; however, the last desired thing the British society needs according to Howard Barker. Objectivity and recourse to communal perceptions of events and social changes adds problems to the already existing cultural issues such as dictated cultural trends and tendencies by authoritarian governments.

At this stage of the play, not only each of the characters, probably except Maria Vasilyevna Voynitsky who remains indifferent throughout the play save for supporting Serebryakov, but also the audience have grown hope that Vanya's energy, and consequently their energy, will be liberated by Voynitsky's action. As a victim of "frustrated decision and annihilated will" (Barker, 1997, p.168), Voynitsky misses the shootings and sinks even deeper into despondency. Placing tragic incidents offstage, Chekhov denies his audience the opportunity

to experience the moments of excruciating pain, which are otherwise cherished by Howard Barker.

In Act Four the professor and his young wife leave the estate for Kharkhov where they will settle down. Maria Vasilyevna remains occupied with her readings and Marina is glad that the estate routine will be re-established with the departure of the visitors. However, Vanya who is too intimidated with the fear of facing the rest of his life has stolen morphine from the doctor's bag contemplating suicide. Sonya implores him to return the morphine which he finally does and encourages him to assist her with accounts of the estate like before. Disheartened by Astrov's departure, who declares that he no longer will have anything to do at the estate and will only visit them if need be, Sonya strives to comfort his uncle, and herself, through recourse to her religious view of life. She accepts that even though they did not live a happy life, they shall rest.

In the Act Four of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, Astrov struggles to convince Vanya to return the medication he has stolen from his bag. He finally succeeds with the help of Sonya who convinces Vanya that they should resume their routine lifestyle like before the professor and his wife's visit. Styan argues that bitterness is an indispensable taste in Chekhov's comic method. He argues that everybody likes Vanya and the cause he is advancing is worthy. However, in a world where justice's triumph is not guaranteed, Vanya should have taken the initiative to shoot the professor (2006, p.90). Styan further argues that:

The juxtaposing of the pathetic and ridiculous incidents, the thrusting of farcical elements into a tense emotional situation, suppress any moralizing [*sic*] tendency and repeatedly induce the ironic detachment of the audience. It is this effect of distancing, together with the troubling relevance of his human and social themes and the elusive lyricism of his stage, which has made Chekhov an immeasurably pervasive influence on the form and style of realistic drama in the twentieth century (*Ibid.*, pp.90-91).

Apart from Chekhov's contribution to shaping the realistic drama's style in the twentieth century as mentioned, the playwright's career as a comic dramatist is characterised by a novel approach to the concepts of individuality and entirety. Especially in *Uncle Vanya*, Chekhov successfully juxtaposes individual attitudes for the purpose of revealing the picture of a situation as a whole marked by incongruity; this aspect of Chekhov's playwriting technique intensifies his influence as a comic writer (Styan, 2006, p.89). This Chekhovian dramatic technique strikes a chord with Howard Barker's insistence on the importance of the individual and individual perception of social changes. Therefore, even though Chekhov drew on individual perspectives to show the bigger picture, Howard Barker shatters the bigger picture to provide each single individual with the opportunity to perceive developments and changes on his or her own.

Howard Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya*

Howard Barker might agree with the likeability of Vanya and the urge to take revenge on his part, nonetheless, he does not agree that Chekhov has been successful in creating a sense of detachment in his audience; hence, his decision to re-create not only Vanya but also Chekhov himself. Barker's act of merging art (Vanya) and artist (Chekhov) is a daring act of bringing down the fourth wall – "the imaginary boundary between the actor and the audience which is created by the actors and supported by the audience in the collusion of suspended disbelief" (Jessop, 2013, p.19) – and uprooting the illusion of art and life and subverts the convention of the wall between the artist and his creation. This is akin to the notion of the Brechtian theatre of the absurd. However, Rabey believes that Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* exposes Chekhov's piece as only nominally a play. He explains that "it is more accurately an essay in ... limitation

Vanya bursts the walls of Chekhov's play by pursuing the unforgivable" (Rabey, 1991 quoted in Rabey, 2006, p.26).

Barker's play, therefore, opens while Astrov seeks to convince Vanya to give him the gun that Vanya claims Chekhov has given him. Barker's Vanya expresses anger and hatred toward Astrov for his selfless love for "unborn generations" and Telyeghin, for his disturbing strumming of the guitar. By disrupting the prevalent dramatic conventions in Chekhov's drama and unsettling Chekhov's original narrative, Barker seeks to subvert the entropy, which dominates Chekhov's play (Smith, 2006, p.44).

Rabey argues that Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* "begins with a savagely comic condensation of Chekhov's world, in which the characters perform extreme versions of their monotonous self-preoccupation" (2006, p.23). To a larger extent, (*Uncle*) *Vanya* profoundly centralises around Vanya. Ironically, Vanya strives hard to force other characters to take him seriously; hence, his constant reiteration that he possesses a gun. Shooting Serebryakov finally validates Vanya's authority. The characters in this play allow volcanic expressions of their long-suppressed hatred for each other. Even though many actions are abandoned halfway through, their very commencement leads to joyous moments of liberation. Terry Eagleton resembles Chekhov's drama to soap operas in the sense of their fasciation and argues that in his drama "nothing much happens but in which we take an inordinate interest in the daily trivia of amiable, off-beat characters" (2003, p.236).

In Act One, for example, Vanya expresses his feelings towards Serebryakov whom he believes is so fortunate with women, including his mother, his late sister and his second wife Helena. Vanya also seizes the opportunity to describe his love for Helena and tells her how he hears her breaths in her room, which is next to his. Sonya admits her love for Astrov and begs him to give her a child, which he denies.

Astrov asks Helena to go and visit his plantation. She hesitates to accept the invitation; Serebryakov, however, encourages her to meet him: "See what he can do for you. And then tell me" (Barker, 2004, p.301). It remains ambiguous though that in the meeting between the two, how cooperative Helena has been "in the ensuing offstage copulation with Astrov"; in other words, it is not known whether she manages to dominate or the meeting led to a rape (Rabey, 2009, p.64).

Serebryakov convenes a meeting and announces his decision to sell the estate, Vanya tempers and leaves, Serebryakov follows him to explain to him; Vanya, nonetheless, shoots him to death. While shots are heard, Sonya stands up and criticises the economic situation, which has led to their "paralysis". Vanya proudly deems violence as the door, which liberates him. Violence is one of the many faces of catastrophe, which Barker's theatre seeks to depict. Barker intends to show Vanya the door that he could finally pass through and arrive at a newer world lonely:

MARYIA: Oh, pathetic man, who thinks the act of violence will –
VANYA: Yes, violence is the door **Oh beautiful ivory gun of Ivory my doorway my birthplace** ... (Barker, 2004, p.305).

Serebryakov's ghost returns on stage and starts commenting on the characters' conversations; mostly voicing Chekhov's views. In denigration of melancholy, which leads to inaction, Sonya declares that:

SONYA: And I
And I (*She gets up as if inspired.*)
You see, the world is sad! Sad, oh, very sad and this sadness is the precondition of all action not the end of it. This sadness is the climate of and not the prison

of, the world. Sadness is not a shroud. It is not the end, but the beginning. (*She laughs.*) I lecture you! (*She turns to ASTROV.*) I want a child and you must give it to me (Barker, 2004, p.312).

The moment the sea appears, Vanya and Sonya become agitated. They are about to achieve what they have longed for; that is, Vanya is getting his way with Helena and Sonya with Astrov. But the moment they feel endangered by Chekhov's presence, Vanya suggests that "let us talk about impotence (*Pause. The sea washes. Serebryakov chuckles.*)" (Barker, 2004, p.316).

Astrov and Serebryakov re-appear onstage as ghosts. The two form "a chorus of fearful, conventional voices praising Chekhov and trying to subordinate the transgressive character's confidence" (Rabey, 2003, p.188). With the glimpse of the sea, the boat and the drowning man, Vanya once again worries about their creation. He urges others to guard what they have created using their will. Once Vanya finds out that the drowning man is Chekhov; he reaches for his gun which now rests with Telyeghin who refuses to give it back to Vanya. Maryia expresses happiness at finding out that Chekhov is alive but is slapped on the face by Marina.

Barker uses ruptures in the set to depict the disintegration of the Chekhovian world. Lamb argues that the appearance of the sea which often marked by spontaneity and incongruity symbolises another world even though its reality is questionable. He further contends that as much as the sea leads to a spirit of jubilation in most of the characters, it also strongly symbolises death (2005, p.182).

Act Two opens while all the characters are standing in a row and Chekhov who has survived the sea is towelling his hair. Serebryakov and Astrov carry on with their chorus-like roles and discuss the role and what-ness of an author. Shaughnessy argues that Barker highlights the contradictions in characters that would be otherwise hidden in the naturalistic style of

representation. He believes that the plurality of voices and modes of address which actors are required to shift across makes them "modulate between semi-'choric' commentary, the conscious display of technique, and more 'personalized' forms of utterance" [*sic*] (1989, p.266). Through "continuing to exist" (Barker, 2004, p.327), Chekhov also practices potency and manages to overcome the sea. Helena outspokenly reveals to Chekhov that Vanya is her lover. Vanya, however, keeps sobbing despite Helena's repeated attempts to stop him.

Chekhov admits that he is suffering from a disease and continues arguing with Vanya who regrets committing murder. Chekhov reveals that he is dying and has in effect come to them to die. He holds out his hand to Vanya and dies while Vanya is holding his hand. Before dying, Chekhov shows Vanya that he understands how Vanya is protective of the situation he has brought into life by killing Serebryakov. Moribund Chekhov struggles to assert control over his characters who resist control.

When Chekhov passes on, the sea also disappears. Telyeghin is the only character to voice his doubts on the existence of the sea. Sonya, then, like a member of a chorus says:

SONYA: You see, the rural gentry ...
In its imagination, even ...
Was constrained by economic impotence ...
It could not even dream. (*Pause*) (Barker, 2004, p.334)

Upon Chekhov's death, other characters that are still haunted by him deem it necessary "to reinvent and incorporate him in their habitual reflexes and fears of freedom" (Rabey, 2009, p.65) which Lamb describes as re-establishing "something like the status quo" (2005, p.185). Maryia's craving for her cup of tea, Telyeghin's achievement in finding his guitar and playing

it, Sonya's retrogress to a state of despair and Helena's worries about being betrayed by Vanya are examples of the above-discussed fear of freedom.

In Act Three, Helena who is sitting in front of "a monstrous mirror" (Barker, 2004, p.335) praises the beauties of her body and seeks confirmation from Vanya who is watching her in silence. Helena is frightened and worried. It is not made clear whether or not she is pregnant as she is not able to discern whether it is the mirror, which is reflecting a thinner image of her. Helena suggest to Vanya a joint suicide pact; nonetheless, she regrets that she will not be Vanya's executioner and he has to do it all by himself. Vanya admits, "I'll manage it" (Barker, 2004, p.339).

In a letter to Rabey on 10 May 1995 which is published in *Howard Barker: Ecstasy and Death* (2009), Howard Barker explicates with regard to Helena's suggestion for suicide that:

The suicide pact is not an event of despair, caused by the futility of further mutuality, but a necessity given they have exhausted the potential for life itself ... they have lived and died in each other ... and the [joint] suicide would have been a triumph of the will and a repudiation of the Chekhovian (p.66).

According to Barker, therefore, the act of suicide reflects the practicing and triumph of the will in defiance of Chekhov. Vanya eventually discovers the door Barker has left open for him. Despite the fact that he mentions to Helena that he will manage suicide and as foreshadowed in Act One when he says that "Sonya, I haven't the courage to commit suicide" (Barker, 2004, p.302), Vanya leaves without having a specific destination and much to Sonya and Maryia's despair he does not come back. Lamb contends that "Chekhov's world is restored – but without desire (Helena) and death (Vanya)" (2005, p.187).

(*Uncle*) Vanya is:

an excellent example of catastrophism in its demonstration that, albeit through unforgivable transgression and unforeseeable pain, the world unlocks, although the self that comes through may be unnatural, inhuman, unrecognizable even to the self [*sic*] (Rabey, 2003, p.188).

Howard Barker employs "Chekhovian melancholic inconsequence and comic resentment" without hesitating to extend them to "Sonya's abruptly active, explicit sexual pursuit of Astrov" (Rabey, 2009, p.63).

In Barker's world, Chekhov is equal to other characters in the sense that having been the original author does not necessarily privilege him. Likewise, the carnival in which everybody is engaged and nobody is a spectator, in (*Uncle*) Vanya, Chekhov as one of the main characters is actively engaged. The main idea is, nonetheless, to make Chekhov engage in resentment more than any other character. Howard Barker has used this practice of embroiling the author of a world in a contradicting situation with his creation (Lamb, 2005, p.162). This type of situation happens with Poussin in *Ego in Arcadia* (1992), Benz in *Rome* (1989), More in *Brutopia* and Chekhov in (*Uncle*) Vanya (*Ibid.*).

Another important carnival trait, which constantly occurs in Barker's (*Uncle*) Vanya, is drawing attention to the bodily lower stratum.

VANYA: **[Chekhov] gave me the gun he supplied me with means**
SEREBRYAKOV: He knows this perfectly well
VANYA: **He provided me**
SEREBRYAKOV: He profoundly regrets this
VANYA: **Does he now**
SEREBRYAKOV: Melodramatic interlude
VANYA: **Too bad too late too everything** (*Pause*) (Barker, 2004, p.308).

For one thing, Vanya abides a sense of resentment, which stems from a severe lack of heroism mingled with the joy of convenience. Vanya duly acknowledges the contradictions, which have occupied his existence, and acknowledges how comic he is:

VANYA: I don't require sympathy tell him. It is possible I am not human. I was comic and now I am inhuman. The comic, the pathetic, the impotence, made me lovable, but underneath I was not human. And nor is anyone. Underneath, Human. Tell Chekhov! (Barker, 2004, p.309).

Despite their genders and sexualities, Barker's characters pursue the state of ecstasy. In this case, ecstasy is defined as "the most intensely compulsive drama of the body and the self-experienced between life and death" (Rabey, 2009, p.15). In other words, it involves "being outside oneself, looking in" (Rabey, 2009, p.15).

Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* presents a permanent process of piling up of energies related to un-lived lives, abandoned acts of love and unfulfilled wishes which are denied liberations through glorifying pain and self-restraint in favour of the resumption of a moral, provincial and class-oriented lifestyle. Barker's Ivan, conversely, celebrates his potency:

VANYA: Let us talk about impotence. (*Pause. The sea washes.*
 SEREBRYAKOV *chuckles.*)
 Yes.
 Let us talk about this thing. (SEREBRYAKOV *chuckles more.*)
 Yes
 We mustn't be afraid of it because (SEREBRYAKOV *stops.*)
 It is a god. I declare it to be. A god (*Pause*)
 A god who brings you to the very rim of the world and shows you – for those
 with eyes to see – such an expanse of clear, translucent light. It is
 transfiguration. (*He gets up.*) Listen, he who refuses shame becomes a master **I**
did not let Chekhov kill my pride I did not let his fingers throttle my
desire (*A sound of a new born child is heard.*) ... (Barker, 2004, p.316).

Vanya's actions in Barker's play trigger a series of otherwise suppressed acts together by other characters. Barker translates the liberation of Vanya's energy to the birth of a new child, of a human being; hence, "the room is filled with births" (Barker, 2004, p.318). The energy emancipation characterises a carnival spirit that flows through (*Uncle*) *Vanya*. Ironically, Barker also celebrates Vanya's anger, because contrary to Chekhov he believes that it does not necessarily need to "dissipate in toxic resentment"; therefore, he rescues Vanya from the aforementioned sense of resentment by the means of lending him "no solution, since there is no solution to a life" (Barker, 2004, p.292). In Act One, Sonya says:

SONYA: You see, what is terrible, what is unforgiveable, what is **pure toxin** is – resentment, isn't it? And we all – oh, we all **resented everything!** (*Pause*) Which was comic. Which was pitiful. Which was utterly demeaning and hateful of mankind ... (Barker, 2004, pp.313-314).

Sonya, the conscience of the crowd, notwithstanding, concedes the sense of resentment, which had haunted the whole household. The resentment garners repugnance as well as facetiousness ultimately eventuating in human degradation.

In his theory of laughter, Bergson argues that to render the laughter provoked by the ephemeral image of a machine working inside a person "analysis and reflection must be called into play". The more the mental and physical behaviour of a human is mechanical and reminiscent of a machine, the more comic its effect becomes. Bergson holds that a comic artist proves its originality through "the special kind of life he imparts to a mere puppet" (Bergson, 1911, pp.30-31).

Bergson defines "gracefulness" as the immateriality passed on by the soul to the body, which is resistant. Then the body imposes its inertia to the "ever-alert activity" of the soul and forces it to retrogress to "automatism." The result is that the person's attitude prevails as materially mechanic instead of constantly revitalizing through contact with "a living ideal" (Bergson, 1911, p.29). This sheds light on the issue Howard Barker takes with Anton Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* leading to his re-writing of the play based on "a living ideal".

Inaction and abandoned will, which is rooted in naturalism that Chekhov lent to the play and the reluctance to bring about change in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, provide ample motivation for Barker to break the power of the former dramatist's pity to celebrate and realise the "desire to become ourselves" (Barker, 2004, p.292). Barker performs his role in shattering Vanya's "self-denial" and celebrating his "self-creation" through seizing on "the single instrument Chekhov had, as it were, left lying idly in his own text" (*Ibid.*, p.292). The above-mentioned single instrument is the gun; which Barker allows Vanya to use successfully.

VANYA: ...

I have a gun. For so long now I have had a gun. This gun
I clean most nights. I clean it with oil in the light of the moon.
This is certainly the habit of an assassin (Barker, 2004, p.296).

Elsewhere in the same Act:

VANYA: My name is Ivan. That is how my father christened me. In that christening was hope, which every abbreviation chewed to dust ... (Barker, 2004, p.307).

As it was discussed in Chapter Two, one of the elements of the Romantic grotesque is the depiction of a terrifying world. In *(Uncle) Vanya*, Ivan faces his everyday life out of a sudden and feels overwhelmed by it. The arrival of the visitors leads Vanya to open his eyes into the meaninglessness and hostility of his days. Barker's analysis of Vanya's state of disillusionment in the Chekhovian world can be best explained in Bakhtin's terms. Bakhtin argues that laughter in the Romantic grotesque maintains its liberating power but loses its power to regenerate.

Barker observes that Chekhov provided Vanya with the pistol as he intended to withdraw it and "it is savage to show a man freedom only to slam the door in his face when he attempts to cross its threshold" (1997, pp.156-157). This explains the reason Vanya is obsessed with the gun throughout Barker's play. This statement by Barker also sheds light on his resentment for the carnivalesque as it also provides subjects with the opportunity to experience freedom but to deny it to them as the end of the feast.

Barker's reworking of *Uncle Vanya* by Chekhov serves greater purposes than only re-writing a play. He resented the "moral vacuity" which existed in the text, its effect on the audience finally the style of thinking which dominated the majority of the theatrical presentations of the contemporary British theatre (Barker, 1997, p.156). He argues that "Vanya's quitting of the Chekhovian madhouse became a metaphor for the potential of art to point heroically, if blindly, to the open door ..." (Barker, 2004, p.292).

VANYA: ...

And in the wilderness I came to myself. I met myself. Between
Such wanting and such failing was – (*Pause*) Truth ... (*Suddenly, with
passion.*) I don't like the word either! I scorn it. I assure you! (He laughs.)
Truth! What's that? And I left the room. (Barker, 2004, pp.316-317).

Vanya thus meets himself and comes to himself. He becomes the person he desires to be and cherishes this feeling. When the (non)existence of the "sea" turns into a matter of dispute, the characters state their opinions about it. Vanya describes it as follows:

VANYA: It is a mirror on which you will discover only more of yourself. Self and more self. This self you must attend to and not attempt to evade by flight. There! I have advised you. Look at the sea by all means, but you will achieve precisely nothing by trying to cross it ... (Barker, 2004, p.318).

Elsewhere, Vanya explains that:

VANYA: I am the creation of my own will, Helena. And possibly entirely false. And yet this falseness is – (Barker, 2004: p.22).

The moment Vanya successfully shoots the egoist professor serves as a landmark in liberating energies which were formerly suppressed in favour of self-sacrifice for others; while more biting those individuals in whose favour the sacrifice was made were not content with the situation either; thus, making the sacrifice more nihilistic and meaningless. The moment Vanya is liberated from the grudge of a regretfully unlive d life, the reign of entropy is subverted and the dominant order is disrupted.

Nevertheless, such an upheaval necessitates plentiful contradictions and abundance of pain. The process shows no indications of ease on the part of the character. However, once achieved, the power of will and becoming can be celebrated as it can be discerned in Vanya's declaration, "I am the creation of my own will, Helena. And possibly entirely false ..."

(Barker, 2004, p.322).

Bakhtin's individual is "action-oriented" who carries out actions consciously. Bakhtin holds that unless the self takes an action consciously, he or she cannot be held accountable. Like Bakhtin, Barker values consciousness of action and non-intuitive measures. He ensures that his characters knowingly commit themselves to undertaking actions which would finally lead to their failure. The very notion of failure translates into "becoming" which is the essence of the Theatre of Catastrophe. Shuttleworth argues that in *(Uncle) Vanya*, "characters burst free of what Barker views as the immoral limitations imposed upon them by Chekhov" (2011).

In 1990s, Howard Barker decisively started re-working Chekhov with a concentration on *Uncle Vanya* (Lamb, 2013, p.88). Constant airings of *Uncle Vanya* on stage and filming it twice in the English-speaking world in the 90s affected Barker's re-writing of the play as he believed that different staging of the play by different directors would not solve the play's problems. He believed that a writer is required to re-work the whole play. Barker believed that the theatre was misusing the naturalism and entropy, which existed in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*.

Barker disliked Chekhov less for artistic personalities, which he found contrasting than for the theatrical using of Chekhov to pander to self-loathing and spiritual failure. Chekhov's reign over the British stage was indicative of spiritual weakness. The mere dispiritedness, which rules the Chekhovian world, does not amount to tragic qualifications for the playwright.

The despondence that exists in Chekhov's works turns contagious and consequently culminates in insolubility, insincerely flattering ending and even nonchalance (Barker, 2012, Chapter 16). Disparaging heroism, detouring moral inclination and the beautification of stasis are among the main issues that Barker takes with Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* in a social climate that is confounded by personal autonomy desiring congruity and overwhelmed by the unswerving domestic power (Barker, 1997, p.169).

A far-fetched idealised future, meant to be even achieved in the next life, opens an avenue for escapism, which despite its unlikeliness provides ample motivation for Sonya and Uncle Vanya to survive the realisation of the absurdity of their lives (Whyman, 2011, p.27). A new era necessitates a new theatre with a new text. The audience of an age, which features "decayed ruins of a critical theatre", should not be expected to respond to a text let alone creating meaning out of it (Barker, 1997, p.169).

Rabey argues that the special dynamic of a play such as (*Uncle*) *Vanya*, exemplify a hell-raising Barkerian trope, "in that some personified force conventionally repressed or marginalised as 'abject' erupts into the centre of the stage action to claim dramatic primacy and wreak havoc" (2006, p.18). Rabey adds that such transgressive protagonists "are sometimes catechised by choric figures, resembling the classical Eumenides or furies, except that this outraged chorus represents a moral-historical order, which would reclaim and/or prosecute the transgressor(s)" (*Ibid.*).

With the prospect of theatre of such an age in view, there remains no space for manoeuvring of the idea of arts' influence on life. The idea has become dormant. Therefore, in order to deliver the audience from a lack of heroism from which the characters endure, it is imperative to authorise intrepidity. In a theatrical climate as such, Chekhov's character Uncle Vanya

would be entirely displaced; hence, Barker strips his Vanya of his avuncularity (Barker, 1997, p.170). Barker argues:

But if it is the fate of great texts to be employed in this unconscious way as an element of social discipline, both reflecting social values but also endorsing them, and, consequently, *policing* them, they are nevertheless not immune to the innocent question – so often ruled out of order, but always trembling on our lip 'did it have to be thus?' In other words, did Vanya have to be Vanya? Or better still, did he have to be *Uncle* Vanya? That this secret enquiry is a testament to the very naturalism that Chekhov made his *métier* (1997, p.169).

Barker censures Chekhov for his naturalism and dismisses the very entrance of ethics into the artistic endeavour. He believes that once the artist seeks to distinguish the important from the unimportant or "the life of one from another", he is providing ethics' pass to the realm of arts. Consequently, the parenthesised title of Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* is the least indication of Vanya's striving to eliminate "the patronising manner of his cycle and to reclaim his full name, Ivan, and the dignity that goes with it" (Barker, 2012, Chapter 16).

Vanya, consequently, seizes the opportunity to persuade his family to drop "Uncle" and call him by his Christian name. Even Sonya's explanation to him that eventually he is her uncle not only fails to convince him but also triggers the aggressive act of slapping Sonya on the face:

MARYIA: Who gave you that gun ...?
VANYA: Chekhov. Chekhov did. (*They stare at him.*)
SONYA: Uncle Vanya, what have you ---
VANYA (quietly): Ivan.
SONYA: Have you hurt anyone, have you ---
VANYA: Ivan. (*Pause*) The word uncle castrated me. I forbid the word.
SONYA (*defiantly*): You are my uncle and I'll – (VANYA slaps
SONYA's face. She reels.)

MARYIA: Jean!

VANYA: No, that's French. And Vanya is diminutive.

No more diminutives, or endearments, abbreviations or

Things to hang yourself on

Ivan is the name (Barker, 2004, p.305).

Vanya equally suffers from identity crisis. He attributes his lack of decisiveness and the inability to practise will to the manner he is addressed by his family. Despite the fact that it is unsophisticated to deem that if the name is changed, he will accordingly change, it is not without its privileges either.

By forcing them to address him as Ivan, Vanya assists himself in achieving his goal by projecting a desirable image of him by the help of others. In other words, deep inside he does not thoroughly believe in his new identity, consequently, he is implicitly pleading others to support him with losing his avuncularity.

Charles Lamb traces Vanya's character to "a clown archetype: Perriot". He argues that "Vanya's interruption of Astrov and Yelena's moment of passion brandishing a bunch of roses is a typical Perriot gag: his hapless naivety contrasting with Astrov's cynical and brutal Harlequin" (Lamb, 2013, p.89). Vanya fulfils the role of a cruelly comic Chorus while conspicuously expressing his despondence. Vanya provokes the audience to develop opinions about other characters of the play and Vanya's intentions, their opinions are, nonetheless, informed by their concepts and imaginations, which are otherwise manipulated by Vanya (Rabey, 2009, p.62).

Inborn vices can contribute to the creation of a drama but not to comedies. Vices, which construct a comedy, are ready-made into which characters step (Bergson, 1911, pp.14-15). It is in the same light that Howard Barker repudiates naturalism and illustrates and elaborates his Theatre of Catastrophe.

The comic poet's mastery of art encompasses acquainting and intimating the audience with the vice in question to the extent that the spectator gains a hand over working the marionette. In this case, an automatism is involved which makes us laugh (Bergson, 1911, p.16). For Howard Barker both the actors and the director manipulate the characters of the play; hence, the establishment and importance of *The Wrestling School*.

In re-working *Uncle Vanya*, Barker intentionally adopts a non-naturalistic style “with a wide range of rhetorical, syntactical and figurative devices such as repetition, lengthy parenthesis, and metaphor”. Moreover, Vanya’s speech is often filled with “irony” (Lamb, 2013, p.93).

Chekhov haunts Barker’s play. Apart from his presence as a character or chorus as some have argued, is also incarnated in the sea, the gun and the guitar Telyeghin strums.

The role of the Chorus is significant in the Theatre of Catastrophe, Barker contends that as a:

"means of dislocation – and dislocation is the function of art in a time of smothering consensus – is the employment of the Chorus, which stands outside, and interferes with, the working of the Realist narrative, often in a form which refuses the audience the opportunity to take its statements for granted [...] but which also permits the restoration of poetry to the stage, thereby insisting on the distinction between the stage and common life" (Barker, 1997, p.122).

In order to refer to “instances where characters repress powerful feelings and – over a period of time – become seriously embittered and incapable of action”, Howard Barker uses the term “toxicity” (Lamb, 2013, p.94).

VANYA: I don’t require sympathy tell him. (*Pause*) It is possible that I’m not human. I was comic and now I am inhuman. The comic, the pathetic, the impotence made me loveable, but underneath I was not human. And nor is anyone underneath. Human. Tell Chekhov (Barker, 2004, p.309).

One of the main features of Chekhov's comedy is its instant failures: Vanya's failure to shoot successfully, Sonya's failure to win Astrov's love, Vanya's failure to seduce Helena, Serebryakov's failure to become a successful scholar, his failure to sell the estate, and Astrov's failure in medical practice when a patient dies under chloroform.

Based on the Bergsonian theory of laughter mechanicality joined by repetition and similarity exerts a comic effect. In *(Uncle) Vanya*, repetitions play a dominant role in creating a comic effect. For instance, characters keep hushing each other in the middle of a significant argument.

VANYA: **Kill you I said** (*An old SERVANT crosses the stage.*)

MARINA: Shh ...

VANYA: **Absolutely kill**

MARINA: Shh ... (*She goes out. The guitar stops.*)

VANYA: I detest your futile and transparent attempts to suffocate
my hatred in what you call compassion what
you call what you call your absurd maternal and anodyne endearments
what you call what you call (*The music begins.*) **Who is
that guitarist stop him** (Barker, 2004, pp.295-296)

Marina's endearments reek of absurdity to Vanya; he hates compassion and whatever feeling which would remind him of his "avuncularity".

The continuous "shhing" takes up momentum as the play advances to the next Acts. Each character seizes the occasion for suppressing others' thoughts and thereof expression. The comic technique that Barker applies in truth intensifies the entropy, which exerts influence over the Chekhovian world.

ASTORV: Bullying young women

VANYA: Trying to take power I was I was (*MARINA crosses the stage.*)
 MARINA: Shh ...
 VANYA: I was
 MARINA: Shh ... (*She goes out.*)
 VANYA: Because I love you.
 HELENA: Love ...! (Barker, 2004, p.297).

Vanya constantly refers to the relation between Helena and Serebryakov in a material and sexual manner. In other words, he constantly engages with the bodily lower stratum while Serebryakov is preoccupied by the plights of his ill grotesque body. He dreams of losing body parts and is constantly in pain.

Deformities can be laughable; some are so naturally and some require ugliness for acquiring a comic effect (Bergson, 1911, p.24). I would like to argue that in case of Howard Barker's theory of theatre, ugliness translates into artificiality. Resentment, impotence and apology, which constituted the moral pillars of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, are ruptured into pieces by Barker. As discussed in the previous chapter, breaking the morality and hierarchies cater for the carnivalesque. Barker's characters are even aware that building their desired lives on the ruins of what existed formerly will be only conducive to more intrepidity.

HELENA: The worst thing in a man ...
 No ...
 The only bad thing ...
 Is apology ... (*She turns defiantly to MARYIA.*)
 Did you find that?
 TELYEGHIN: (*entering*): It's true Ivan Petrovich, the water is –
 (*He sees SONYA is asphyxiating ASTROV.*) Maryia –
 MARIYA: Shh.
 TELYEGHIN: Maryia Vassilievna –
 MARIYA: Shh I said.
 TELYEGHIN: Vanya – Vanya – she –
 VANYA: I'm not Vanya –
 TELYEGHIN: Ivan, then – (*SONYA is lowering the dying ASTROV to the floor.*) **Someone!** (*He is fixed. SONYA stands upright.*) (Barker, 2004, p.319)

Death and birth are two sides of the same coin in the carnivalesque and death is followed by regeneration. Even though the Theatre of Catastrophe makes death dominant, it celebrates the birth or regeneration that emerges out of death. In (*Uncle*) *Vanya*, the regeneration after death occurs several times. Therefore, when Sonya asphyxiates Astrov, she releases herself from all that is strangling her ranging from her grotesque image of her body and lack of beauty to her dire thirst for being seen by Astrov.

TELYEGHIN: I nearly died! They nearly killed me! She especially, wanted to castrate me and tread on my eyes!

CHEKHOV: Shh ...

TELYEGHIN: Sonya, little Sonya Alexandrovna, who would have believed?

CHEKHOV: Shh ... (Barker, 2004, p.326)

Another instance is:

VANYA: I am not fond of you

CHEKHOV: You fill me with laughter

VANYA: Do I?

CHEKHOV: A laughter which is without malice or contempt, a laughter such as the moon might laugh at the homeward journey of a drunken man ...

VANYA: I would rather kill myself than –

CHEKHOV: Shh ...

VANYA: Live one hour as –

CHEKHOV: Shh ...

MARINA: Don't shush him you – you – (CHEKHOV *laughs at* MARINA's *vehemence*.) (Barker, 2004, p.328).

Helena, who is beautiful and intelligent, reaches a moment of perfection after she establishes an understanding of herself. Helen, however, decides to end this sense of completeness by persuading Vanya to shoot her. Lamb argues that Vanya "is a significant variant of a character 'entering Death'" (Lamb, 2005, p.174).

The last moment of hushing in *(Uncle) Vanya* occurs when Vanya, who has murdered Helena, asks Marina to look at her dead face. Vanya then commences to deliver a lecture on how no one liked Helena, etc. All the characters who have meanwhile constituted a complete chorus "shh" Vanya and force him to stop. Despite its comic effect, frequent hushings are also impregnated with catastrophic moments examples of which include observing a murder and looking at a corpse. Moreover, the hushing intends to remind the audience of the suffocated Chekhovian world which went neglected in the many performances of his works, specifically, his *Uncle Vanya*.

VANYA: Missed. (*Pause*)
Damnation. (*Pause, then he laughs. He calls.*)
Nanny! I can't look at her. You must do it. I apologize,
these things are more than a servant is required in normal circumstances to
perform however I and no one liked Helena no one liked such power admiration
she aroused and plenty of respect but – (*He chokes in sobs.*)
ALL: Shh ... (VANYA *wails.*) Shhh! (Barker, 2004, p.340).

Carnival elements are scattered in Barker's *(Uncle) Vanya*. The characters are repeatedly referring to the issues related to sexuality or "bodily lower stratum". Vanya's wonderings about the intercourse between Helena and Serebryakov, the contact of the two's flesh and Serebryakov's way with women form a carnival aspect.

The inversion of hierarchies, which take place specifically after the emergence of Chekhov, is another major tenet of the carnival, which Barker employs. Instances of this include Marina slapping Maryia and Vanya disputing Chekhov and constantly undermining his authority as the author. The notions related to birth, that is pregnancy and giving birth, constitute another carnival facet in the play. Sonya pleads to Astrov to give her a child and Helena consults a mirror to find out if she is pregnant. The reality, however, remains uncovered and the audience is left with the ambiguity.

4.4.2. Barker Re-defines Chekhovian Dramaturgy

Elizabeth Angel-Perez holds that "Barker's rewritings do not leave us with fragmented pieces of a deconstructed myth. They enable us to engrave a different story, a different linearity, so to speak, at the heart of a stammering process" (2013, pp.42-43). In the case of (*Uncle Vanya*), Barker rewrites Chekhov in order to revisit the humanist grand narrative (*Ibid.*, p.38). Both Anton Chekhov and Howard Barker lived through ages of volcanic social upheavals; however, their specific artistic responses to the events have been very different.

Styan argues that Chekhov chose to write comedies in order to maintain an objective attitude towards the events occurring in his society (2006, p.89). He further explicates that Chekhov uses undercuts instead of exaggerations to establish his comic style which has a "bitter aftertaste" (*Ibid.*, p.90).

At the end of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, Vanya says that "Finita La Comedia". However, at the end of Barker's (*Uncle Vanya*), we notice that the carnival has ended without any formal announcement such as the one in Chekhov's play. This is done as if the younger playwright seeks to reconfigure his predecessor's dramaturgy.

Chekhov's dramaturgy is characterised with resentment, lack of will and apology. Barker shatters these features, which are considered as values, and transforms them into concepts of 'regretlessness', personal determination to practice will and the confidence not to apologise with what has taken place. As much as Chekhov strove not to trespass the moral norms of the day, Barker decisively transgresses the moral framework in the society as depicted in (*Uncle Vanya*).

For Barker, there is no value in showing the characters the way to freedom and liberation from the stranglehold of thoughts/society/authority or any other suppressive forces only to deny them the opportunity to step on the way. Barker, therefore, insists that even though the characters might never achieve that status of liberation, their very effort to thrive must be cherished. Believing as such, Barker refuses to offer any messages in his theatre. By re-working Chekhov, he undermines what Chekhov and his theatre stand for, as explained above, and expands the realm of his art to the portrayed possibilities and alternatives which exist at all in the world beyond the stage.

In this chapter, we showed that as a result, Barker in his celebration of heroism or anti-heroism creates a Vanya who does not hesitate to take the action that he believes in and consequently kills the professor. In view of the foregoing, Barker argues that through allowing Vanya to experience a "solitary success". He manages to subvert "the melancholia of the entire play" (1997, p.170).

Barker indeed counterpoints "the familiar tactics of Chekhovian evasion through small-talk ... by dream-like moments of eloquent and shameless expression" (Rabey, 2003, p.188). An instance of this occurs when Helena straightforwardly recounts her private moments with Serebryakov.

Therefore, Barker's transfiguration of Chekhov's comedy takes place by the means of abandonment of humanist and naturalistic gestures embedded and embodied in the senior playwright's *Uncle Vanya* – as the "humanistic vision of man can no longer be defended" (Angel-Perez, 2006, p.137). Howard Barker's play is more comic than Chekhov's is as it embraces comedy in the encountering of Chekhov with Vanya and the conversations they have. This is an eerie play on the art and artist, the old-age illusion and the real where

Chekhov the original author is made to converse with his creation, Vanya. Finally, Barker stresses that:

... such autonomy that follows on the restoration of will to the protagonist ... ruptures comedy with its intimate dependency on failure, and draws him into the tragic landscape whose wilderness, willingly entered, must bring solitude or death" (1997, p.170).

Nevertheless, he delivers a play, which is more comic than the original one despite his attempt to turn the comedy on its feet. Howard Barker blatantly blames Chekhov for his play *Uncle Vanya* and its subsequent advocating of impotence and celebration of predetermination. Barker's dismissal of the world Chekhov created in *Uncle Vanya* has provoked close analysis by critics such as Rabey who believes that Barker's *Vanya* sheds light on the fact that Chekhov's play is not a play at all; it rather qualifies for an "essay". Contrary to Chekhov, Barker embarks on a journey to trespass the limits of the conventional morality prescribed by the former playwright (Rabey, 2009, p.63).

Howard Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* commences with a "savagely comic condensation of Chekhov's world" (Rabey, 2009, p.62). In rejection of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, Barker lays emphasis on the most melancholic, negative and "macabre" feelings which the Russian playwright provokes in its audience. Barker calls attention to the play's "appeal to the death wish in ourselves", "melancholy celebration of paralysis and spiritual vacuity", "power of pity" and "adoration of the broken will". His powerful urge to re-write Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* is considerably rooted in the necessity "for our own spiritual health to know Vanya need not be Vanya" (Barker, 2004, p.292).

Barker maintains the tragicomedy of the Chekhovian play but rather verges on the absurd. Rather than introducing characters and their relationship with each other, Howard Barker describes their personalities as follows:

Serebryakov as a Genius in Decay, Helena as A Woman in Search of Experience, Sonya A Spinster with Powerful Arms, Vanya as An Undefeated Man, Maryia A Widow Inclined to Forgive, Astrov A Conscience without Power, Telyeghin An Apologist for Himself, Marina A Discriminating Servant and finally Chekhov A Loved Dramatist. Barker has kept the number of the characters but has replaced the Watch Man in Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* with Chekhov himself.

Rabey describes Barker's stage design as "scrupulously delivered" and of "operatic reach and scale" (Rabey, 2009, p.4). The language of characters is "often raw, strongly explicit, surgically incisive and disruptive of what might otherwise be socially harmonious" (Rabey, 2009, p.4). Barker's (*Uncle*) *Vanya* queries the morality of Chekhov's play by the means of characters and events that sharply deviate from the source narrative (Rabey, 2009, p.4).

In penning his antipathy for Chekhov with the focus on his most Chekhovian play, that is *Uncle Vanya*, Howard Barker not only kept and enhanced the humour of the former play but also took a step further to establish his comedy of becoming and life, "catastrophic comedy" in his Theatre of Catastrophe.

Howard Barker, thus, immerses humour and comedy to the resentment and hatred, which has contaminated the Chekhovian play, while also teasing our senses by employing the art of illusion. Having established such an insight for the audience, Barker then embarks on a journey of creating a style, which I believe, is not only catastrophic but also carnival. This chapter established this point that as Barker shifts toward his art of theatre, elements of the

carnavalesque featuring grotesque images become recurrent and more welcome aspect of his art.

Hugh Hodgart, director, believes that Barker's approach to theatre is exactly like Chekhov's approach. He mentions that like Chekhov who "refused to plough the straightforward, liberal humanist, anti-Czarist furrow", Barker also adopts a broader and more polemic view of life (Hodgart, 2013).

Finally, the antagonism which Barker shows in approaching Chekhov must not mislead readers and the audience from understanding how similar the two dramatists are in responding to the situations of their times. In other words, they established new ways of looking at life through their arts.

4.5. Summary: The Comic as Social Leveller

While Chapter Three focused on Barker's oeuvre of the seventies, Chapter Four studied the sophisticated works of the eighties and the zenith of Barker's achievement in writing a catastrophic comedy by re-working Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*. Interestingly, *The Castle*, *The Power of the Dog*, and *The Europeans* mark not only achievements in Barker's tragic theatre but also in his closet comic ambitions depicted under the carnivalesque guise.

In all these plays, the power of the above-mentioned top authorities are subverted and they are overthrown from their hierarchical place albeit temporarily. Their temporary misplacement, which leads to a suspension of the dominant rules and principles, serves as eye-opening measures in disguise. The participants in the carnival, which Barker had started, experience another alternative to their existence which leaves them with a second thought on

the choices they can take and limits they can push. Therefore, at the end of the carnival, despite knowing that they are obliged to resume their lives, they desire for a new order which they deem inevitable.

It was argued in Chapter Two earlier, that the concept of body remains open and unending in the carnival. The point made here is that body is "blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (Bakhtin, 1968, pp.26-27). In the Theatre of Catastrophe, the body is rather blended with abstract notions, with the intangible fabrications of the character's imaginations. Bakhtin believes that through "images of material bodily existence ... the kind of things a society fears (such as terror of death) can be mocked, transformed and conquered" (James, 2004, p.377).

Like Bakhtin, Howard Barker inclines toward subversion. He, however, creates characters who undertake to first subvert the undesirable conditions prevailing in their immediate environments and then move to the larger scales of the society. In plays, such as *Stripwell* and *Claw*, Barker engages his protagonists with bigger circles of power to allow the audience the observation of their struggles for subversion of the situation. Barker frequently employs humour and comedy, in his Theatre of Catastrophe, as a social leveller despite his contempt for comedy. However, in the plays studied in this chapter, Barker engages with characters who are themselves the source of power or authority.

The beginning of comedy requires "callousness to social life" and the comic individual is negligent of his fellow beings. The equivocal nature of the comic makes belong "neither altogether to art nor altogether to life" (Bergson, 1911, p.134). Comedy "accepts social life as a natural environment" (Bergson, 1911, p.170).

Laughter results from an inborn mechanism gifted to us by nature or from our lifelong "acquaintance with social life" (Bergson, 1911, p.198). I contend that for the same reason

Howard Barker favours a cruel laughter, which is more distanced from the natural source of the phenomenon and is anti-naturalistic. In laughter, a curious pessimism begins which grows more obvious with the laugher's thorough analysis of the laughter. Behind laughter, there is bitterness (Bergson, 1911, p.199).

For Barker, laughter qualifies as a manifestation of solidarity, which, in the contemporary culture and thanks to authorities, has transfigured into an indication of subordination. The comedy offers the audience an experience of contempt disguised as comedy. This is while the audience must experience pain instead of contempt (Barker, 1997, p.45).

Therefore, within the territories of Barker's new theatrical practice, the Theatre of Catastrophe, opposites are either reconciled, left in even greater conflict or depicted as belonging to the same psyche. In the same respect, laughter can be consequently more oppressive than liberating. It is, nonetheless, the task of the audience to interpret for themselves based on actors' performance. Barker's attitude to laughter can be expressed in Bakhtin's words that "the essential truth about the world and about man cannot be told in the language of laughter" (1984, p.67).

CHAPTER FIVE

5. Observations on Barker's Carnavalesque Tragedies

In Chapter One I established the foundation on which this research is based and argued that Howard Barker's re-writing of Chekhov's play, *Uncle Vanya*, marked the inception and eventual thriving of his new genre. Even though in his theorising Barker establishes his theory of catastrophism which entails a complete re-invention of playwriting, performing, acting and directing, there is nonetheless a much under-acknowledged aspect to Barker's catastrophism which can be summarised in humour and comedy.

In Chapter Two, I discussed the theories of carnival including grotesque imagery and its ability to challenge the official reality. It was also demonstrated that according to Bakhtin's theory, religious and ruling systems used catastrophe to inflict society with fear in order to secure social cohesion. I would thus like to argue that Barker, who believes that pain is the most defining element of his theatre, inflicts catastrophe upon his characters and subsequently upon his actors and audience to firstly liberate them from any such fears that the dominating power seeks to fuel. Using grotesque imagery Barker, therefore, foils the State sponsored fear and reminds his audience of their freedom.

In Chapters Three and Four, a close reading of seven of Barker's most significant plays of the Theatre of Catastrophe was undertaken to prove that for creating the comic effect, which he apparently shuns away from, Barker, even has a method, which has been neglected by scholars so far. This illuminated the gap in scholarly research on the subject under study. This research therefore shed light on the carnivalesque as the main means utilised by Howard Barker to create his not-so-tragic catastrophism, a new dramaturgy.

5.1 Carnival components of the Theatre of Catastrophe

In this section, I summarise the most outstanding aspects of the carnivalesque, which prevail in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. Grotesque realism, laughter and the marketplace as the three essential carnival components constitute a solid ground in Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe on which he founds his catastrophism. Having contempt for social realism it is not therefore unexpected and unacceptable that Barker should incline towards grotesque realism. These components, nonetheless, acquire alternative attributes in Barker's theatre depending on the play and the historical site where stories take place.

The carnival spirit which sparked enthusiasm among the left-wing playwrights did not attract Barker for several reasons. Firstly, the absence of ambiguity and vehement imagination was a huge flaw of such an approach to theatre. Secondly, carnival, comedy and musical fail in setting justice as their primary goal and are highly dependent on compromise. Thirdly, comedy, communal theatre and carnivalesque urge the audience to do things in unison which Barker abhors because neither does it lead to collectivity nor does it challenge the audience to question who they really are. Barker, however, uses a meticulously and dexterously blend of the details of satire, comedy and carnival to create his elitist tragic theatre.

Barker is well known for his uncompromising attitude towards the mainstream culture's promotion of musicals and comedy, which according to him bars the creative imagination from flourishing. They, moreover, promote lower strata of culture, which is one of the main concerns of Bakhtin's theory of the carnival. Barker, a non-believer in comedy, maintains that comedy is doomed to fail (Barker, 1997, p.168). Barker, however, depicts the grotesque

degradation of laughter in such an age through his cruel laughter and savage humour. Barker's theories of laughter significantly differ from Bakhtin's as will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

This belief, however, does not necessarily bar Barker from writing humorous plays enhancing the meanings he wishes to create. The catastrophic climate, which exists in Barker's works, becomes yet more sophisticated by the means of the humour, which gives depth to his work. In fact, the one-sided quality of the official advocating of laughter and the comic culture forced Barker to re-think and revise the theatre's relation with tragedy in his Theatre of Catastrophe.

Therefore, the Theatre of Catastrophe initiates a change through entering the carnivalesque realm to demonstrate the subversive qualities of catastrophe as opposed to laughter in defiance of the mainstream culture. Theatre of Catastrophe also insists on breaking the boundaries that are imposed on individuals. Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe is most often read as a tragic theatre and its comic and carnival qualities are undermined.

Additionally, the carnival imagery that Barker draws on can be further decomposed into a number of elements including degradation, rejuvenation, the grotesque, and feasting. This thesis sought to dispute the hierarchy that Barker advocates vis-à-vis the tragedy/comedy dichotomy. Barker grants superiority to his Theatre of Catastrophe by assigning to it tragic attributes while he degrades comedy and humour. This research, nonetheless, celebrated a marriage of the lower and the higher strata of both culture and imagination as depicted in the Theatre of Catastrophe.

In Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe, the conflict is caused by characters' intentions and not incidents. Characters rather plan revolts against situations, which physically, mentally and

emotionally paralyse them. The outcome is not necessarily as catastrophic as the procedure though.

Theatre of Catastrophe represents every man's fantasy and does not mind repressing it in many occasions. The pain that the audience and the characters as well as actors endure turns either into knowledge or into death, which translates into liberation.

Barker has proved himself talented and willed in creating senses of anxiety by the most unlikely means. The catastrophe, which Barker relies on for creating modern tragedy, also accounts for the majority of humour, which prevails many of his plays.

5.2 Findings: Carnavalesque or Catastrophic?

Barker argues that great works of art "are not susceptible to control even by their makers [...]" and mentions that serious works of art are expected to feature what he terms "the mutiny of characters" (2007, pp.289-290). He describes this characteristic as "an uprising of the unconscious, a spontaneity whose consequences cannot be foreseen or controlled" and which leads to throwing the author "*off course*" (Ibid). Therefore, it does not matter how strongly Barker emphasises on the importance of tragedy; the carnival finds its way out of the layers of tragedy to prove its existence in the underlying folds of his theatre of catastrophe.

I would like to conclude that firstly, "comedy of life and becoming" is an indispensable component of Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. Barker's comic style is less about laughter and joy and more about pain and re-birth. Death and re-birth are two frequent motifs in the Theatre of Catastrophe in which death often translates into individual, collective,

emotional or mental renaissance by the means of the vivifying properties such as eternity which Barker ascribes to it.

One of the significant beliefs of Barker is that people laugh because they fear. Consequently, for Barker, the only laughter, which is legitimate, is the Dionysian laughter.

Heteroglossia could not be established as a feature of the Theatre of Catastrophe because Barker, unlike Bakhtin, did not favour the language of the marketplace as it was vulgarised by the dominant state policies that exist behind mainstream culture. It should be highlighted however that he uses the vernacular seldom an example of which would be the clown in *The Power of the Dog*.

Participation and the involvement of the audience, collectively accepting the individual experience each audience is required by the playwright to go through and a search for one's self and realisation of it, are operative features of Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe. By dragging his characters into the wilderness of the catastrophic, Barker addresses the questions of morality, conscience and imagination while engaging on a deeper level with the carnival and the grotesque. Barker's grotesque depiction of catastrophic situations imposed on characters argues for such a reading of his Art of Theatre.

However, this dissertation argues that although laughter and comedy seem to have been banned in the Theatre of Catastrophe, the Theatre's prominent plays serve as an apology for the very abandoned notions. In other words, Barker's plays accommodate the apology for laughter and comedy. Even though Howard Barker is skeptical of the social and political function of the comedy, he insists on the use of humour in his plays in line with his theatrical policies that are to disrupt the comfort of the audience.

Engagement with lower bodily strata is an indispensable factor of the Theatre of Catastrophe. Barker preserves the elements, motifs and themes deployed in comedy and carnival but setting them in a "catastrophic" location/arena/situation/time, he labels it as tragedy.

Even though this thesis started on the premises that Barker shares contempt for comedy and carnival, it sets to conclude that Barker prefers a kind of carnival at the end of which participants refuse to resume their pre-carnival lives. For Barker, the unacknowledged value of the carnival rests in characters' seeking to overthrow the hierarchy in the real life also. This is a situation which leads to the tragic death of most of Barker's characters. In other words, when the carnival ends, characters refuse to be who they used to be and seek to create new lives.

Group activity is a crucial trait of the carnival, none withstanding, the Theatre of Catastrophe favours individuals' engagement with the events rather than collectivity. The Theatre of Catastrophe gains its energy from breaking the siege of entropy and the liberation of energies which would have been otherwise suffocated.

Barker uses the lower strata of culture to approach the official culture in the post-modern British society. Like carnival which served as popular culture as opposed to the official culture which tended to be serious, the Theatre of Catastrophe in its seriousness serves as a "what-could-be" world which offers an alternative way of living in a less serious real world which is haunted by the establishment. Barker's characters who have therefore experienced an alternative life acquire insights which leads to a tragic abandonment of their previous lifestyle.

To offer a Bakhtinian reading of the Theatre of Catastrophe, this dissertation proved that the Theatre of Catastrophe creates an atmosphere influenced by the contemporary culture in which laughter is degraded and pain is regenerated to form catastrophism. Catastrophism as

marked by both grotesque behaviours and bodies along with offering alternative life styles/depiction of events account for throwing a challenge to official culture and the practice of the mainstream theatre.

In the same spirit, pain perpetually produces knowledge, which ultimately results in shaping a new state of mind, character or situation. This novelty inclines toward the liberation of an individual from the stranglehold in which he/she is trapped. Death and pain, therefore, translate into becoming and emancipation.

Barker's catastrophic comedy expresses the same aesthetic attitude to life which carnival also builds on. In Barker's catastrophic comedy, however, the negative aspect has been more prominent, still Barker retains the regenerative laughter in his comedy, which was intended by Bakhtin. Barker's aesthetics is nevertheless particularised by degradation, or in Henri Bergson's words, in distraction of the mind from the spiritual to the material.

The carnivalesque and the grotesque in the Theatre of Catastrophe intend to both transform the function of laughter and the prevalent socio-political situation by challenging the official British culture. One of the most peculiar features of Barker's catastrophic comedy is the defamiliarisation it brings about in his characters and audience.

5.3 Barker's Cult of Carnivalised Catastrophe

Howard Barker had achieved a deep understanding of the short-comings of socialism and was vehemently disturbed by the new arrangements for arts which was gradually put forward by the authoritarian Thatcherite government. In his quest for creating a new form for the theatre

of the opposition, Barker who had boldly abandoned satire and comedy of the early stages of his career recourse to the carnivalesque even though it was in sharp opposition to the standards he had set in his theories for a catastrophic theatre. It seems as though Barker is even more utterly attracted by ideas/approaches/features he antagonises. A solid example of this is his literary necrophilia with Chekhov. Resembling Chekhov in the sense that he is also a pioneer of the theatre he sought to establish, Barker did not succumb to the artistic dictation of a ruling party with whose values he could not associate himself. He consequently conquered the obstacles created by the policies of such government and established his theatre of carnivalised catastrophe as incarnated in his play (*Uncle*) *Vanya*. Even though Barker's theatre might not represent the carnival spirit and he himself might not succumb whole-heartedly to the idea of the carnival. His theatre of Catastrophe is largely endowed with the carnival spirit. Consequently, as Eagleton argues that tragedy is endowed with a carnivalesque potential, Barker's theatre of Catastrophe possesses and uses its huge potential for the carnivalesque (Eagleton, 2003, p.73).

The language and diction articulated by Howard Barker's characters sound contextually irrelevant. His oeuvre is nonetheless best introduced as a verbally sophisticated attack on a culture, which is corrupted in the end of the official socialism in the Thatcherite era. Barker's plays are therefore fierce polemics composed against the state's politics of culture. In earlier chapters, I discussed that for Barker carnival is conducive to no revolution because when the carnival ends, people remain precisely who they were and resume what they used to do. Despite this, Howard Barker does not completely denounce laughter and admits that its timing is of utmost importance (1979, p.17). The Theatre of Catastrophe, therefore, favours a kind of carnival after which revolutions will happen.

The carnival ends but the characters have sought haven in the roles they have assumed and the hierarchies they have inverted; they are therefore cultivating the ideas of revolution or

change. In the Theatre of Catastrophe, the carnival laughter is uttered when the carnival is over instead of during its course. The audience not only leaves the theatre uncertain of whom they are, they are also doubtful about the changes they need to cause in their lives.

The carnivalesque essence is found in the moments when a bitter defamiliarisation of a situation or thought happens. Likewise, the traditional carnival, the catastrophic carnival revolves around a sense of being able to break away from everything that constraints one despite its painful costs. The over-throwing of boundaries between the playwright and actors who essentially constitute a crucial part of Barker's performances is another characteristic which Theatre of Catastrophe shares with the carnival.

Theatre of Catastrophe can be studied as a carnival because nobody is a spectator. Like in the carnival when everybody is participating in the Theatre of Catastrophe, both the director as well as the audience is actively participating.

Barker's heroes constantly struggle with the dilemma of the life they are living and the life they imagine or wish they could be living. Barker does not recommend any reconciliation for the confusing situations his heroes face. In his theatre, reconciliation has no place and his heroes take daring decisions to make their way out of the stranglehold of their lives' entropy.

These decisions, however, may lead to rejuvenation through not only the death of the individual hero but also the disruption of the situation favouring those who are involved. The entropy must end no matter what its halt entails. At this stage, even death and destruction can be interpreted as rejuvenation.

Barker does not offer a solution but he does not favour escapism either. Therefore, in between the two he offers material for the imagination. He offers the un-lived life and the ecstasy of becoming albeit through death.

Although Barker's contempt for comedy was partly provoked by the advocating of comedy and musical as a safety valve for social and cultural tensions, Barker yet draws on humour and comedy so much so that he can add more depth to the catastrophism he intends to bring about. Barker's cruel comedy consists of an anti-authoritarian force and the laughter, which he directs, possesses energy-liberating properties.

Like carnival, which comes to existence through performance, the Theatre of Catastrophe gains its legitimacy during performance. Each member of the society plays a crucial role in the carnival, and in the Theatre of Catastrophe, actors and audience members are crucial to the realisation of the desired effects of Barker's theatre.

The uncanny, estrangement and defamiliarisation construct the core concepts of the Theatre of Catastrophe. Barker's theatre shares this aspect with the carnival. While Barker's *Art of Theatre* allows "individual struggling at their limits" (Rabey, 2009, p.29), carnival puts forward the opportunity to go beyond those limits and experience a world which was denied to them. However, instead of the slap-in-the-face which is carnival's legacy, the Theatre of Catastrophe takes its audience on a journey to make transgression possible through the means of pain and anxiety.

Morality and consciousness as two areas, which are vehemently challenged by the Theatre of Catastrophe, are also targeted by the carnival. For a brief period, during performances of Barker's plays as well as during the carnival, respectively the audience members and participating individuals are furnished with the chance to think, act or behave "otherwise". Such an experience and either make or break them, both of which are vivifying. Although the tragic side of the Theatre of Catastrophe might "break the solidarity of [the] audience into atoms," its comic aspect verges on making the audience a collective mass once again.

Therefore, through empowering the powerless, the Theatre of Catastrophe plays the carnival role while in the other sense complies with the Bergsonian theory of laughter.

Barker's ever-lasting catastrophic situations, which in the words of Karoline Gritzner lack "knowledge of beginning and end", and marked by "continuity, objectivity and necessity of things as they are" (2020, p.111) form the kind of ruling system which the carnival and popular festivals sought to subvert albeit temporarily. Consequently, the very fact that Barker as the playwright allows the subversion of his authority in writing catastrophes by the means of carnival, grotesque and comic moments further offers legitimacy to the existence of these techniques in his tragedies which for him are a matter of artistic life or death.

5.4 A Conclusion: Blending and Grafting

Looking at the overall body of work by Barker as discussed in this research, one can see the unique contribution that this theatre maker brings to the world of art. Notably, by re-working Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*, Barker proves that there is a well-thought chemistry between the *raison d'être* of the Theatre of Catastrophe and the spirit of carnival which reaches its highest projection in his *(Uncle) Vanya*. Howard Barker's desire for and inclination to depict the "unhappened" matches perfectly with the carnival's depiction of the "impossible to happen"; however, this depiction takes place through an artistically carnival method which takes place on the stage world and not beyond it. It is, therefore, not very reliable how Barker repudiates humour, comedy and carnival. His oeuvre is endowed deeply and consciously with the above-mentioned concepts that it is at some stages difficult to discern between the catastrophe and the carnival.

Barker took two serious issues with the carnivalesque; firstly, it was communal and based on a type of unison amongst participants as well as spectators. This unison for Barker was impregnated with dangerous consequences in the sense that it could not result in revolution. Secondly, being rooted in the folk and popular culture, the carnivalesque offered an escape from life and served entertainment purposes with no insight for the audience to think of alternatives to what exists. Barker did not find any feature or potential in the carnivalesque which would provoke the audience or the participants' imagination. Despite this as proved in the current research, Barker's oeuvre boldly and blatantly features characteristics of the carnivalesque. It was argued earlier in the thesis that Barker was a favourite of neither the right-wing nor the left-wing; a fact which can be clearly depicted in his contempt for both musical advocated and promoted by the state-sponsored mainstream culture and the carnivalesque (as a theatrical form preferred and practiced by left-wing playwrights).

This research shows the power of evolution and re-birth in arts on different levels whether it is re-working a piece by another author or artist or setting the notion of re-working and regeneration as the central subject of a piece of art. The new dramaturgy crafted by Barker offers a departure from and yet still anchored in the older dramatists like Chekhov and Shakespeare. It is intriguing to note that the leftist theatre-makers were not only uncertain about but antagonistic towards the Thatcherite regime and the very senses of uncertainty and antagonism awakened in them a talent of going back to the past and reworking a new dramaturgy to create unprecedented piece to form the opposition theatre. The intertextual re-creation of a Chekhovian play, more than a century after is a laudable skill and choice by Barker for the reason that it proves his precision in spotting the maladies of his age and juxtaposing them against the literary taste promoted in this society. Barker's artistic skill in creating from the old is a material contribution to the scientific knowledge of the dramatic arts advancing both the theory and dramatic performance.

As one brings this discussion to a close, an observation can be made that it is interesting to perceive how Barker also applies one of the most common artistic techniques in creating his dramaturgy. In this study we observe the purposeful layering and interplay of literary elements in Barker's plays from previous literature; a reincarnation of characters and sometimes whole story lines to bring new meaning to his own work. In one sense, we may call it a similar device to intertextuality, only in Barker's case this is the remaking of character and event, not just a play on text. This literary device that Barker employs is unique in its ability to birth new dramaturgy in the younger artistic creation thus making it a unique piece of art, though referencing the previous. Other researchers in the field of drama and theatre, like Motsa (2000) have called this act of borrowing and recreating from a prior piece of work, grafting - much like what a gardener does in blending two plants into one to create a new breed. Albeit referring to a different playwright, Wole Soyinka, James Gibbs describes this remarkable art of blending, back-referencing and intertwining different facets of the art thus:

I think there are all kinds of sources reflected in these [plays] ... 'Grafting is an Ancient Art' is one of my papers in which I look at the way in which [Soyinka] brings together different traditions, a bit like a gardener bringing one bit of plant and grafting it together with another bit of plant. (Gibbs, 1996 quoted in Motsa, 2000, p.168)

In like manner, Barker excels at constantly delivering an art which offers a golden version of his former brazen creations. He establishes a theatre and a style for his theatre so enriched with well-thought artistic and theoretical substructure that it evolves and grows like an organic creature (in the Coleridgian sense of the concept). Therefore, the carnival attributions of his theatre are not confined to the sphere of form but rather expand to affect content as well as characters, actors and spectators alike. It is the final statement emanating from the

results in this research that Barker's art of grafting and blending has advanced the theories of drama and theatre by adding to the standard subgenres of tragedy and comedy.

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